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PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF HOW BLACK MALE
UNDERGRADUATE PERSISTERS DESCRIBE RETENTION AND SOCIAL
INTEGRATION AT A MIDWESTERN PWI

by

André L. Fortune

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Major: Educational Studies
(Educational Leadership and Higher Education)

Under the Supervision of Professors Brent Cejda and Richard E. Hoover

Lincoln, Nebraska

April, 2015

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University of Nebraska, 2015

Advisers: Brent Cejda and Richard E. Hoover

For decades higher education has incurred challenges with increasing undergraduate retention and degree attainment. Lately these challenges, including focus on increasing Black male undergraduate degree attainment, have become a national concern. Scholars like Vincent Tinto (1987, 1993, 2012) have dedicated research to explain why students leave or stay in college. His findings identified the majority of students voluntarily leave institutions for nonacademic reasons that occur outside of class. On many campuses outside of class experiences, which Tinto labeled *social integration*, are primarily facilitated by student affairs practitioners.

The concept of social integration as a factor in student retention provided theoretical foundation for the study. The purpose of the investigation was to use a phenomenological approach to qualitatively explore how social integration contributed to retention of Black male undergraduate persisters at one Midwestern predominantly White institution (PWI). Findings from this study provide practical implications for one Division of Student Affairs.

Despite the realities of national challenges retaining and graduating Black male undergraduates there are a number of Black men persisting to earn their degree. Ten

Black male undergraduate persisters voluntarily participated in this study to share their lived experiences at a Midwestern PWI. Eight themes and three sub-themes emerged from interpretation of the participants' lived experiences.

Themes indicated participants in this study had a mixture of inclusive and exclusionary experiences at the PWI. Nevertheless, the theme "Not Leaving" described the essence of this study. Each of the men in this study were not leaving the university without a degree. The participants described that neither negative nor positive social integration would force them to leave or stay at the institution. Consistent with Tinto's (1987, 1993, 2012) findings, social integration was a plus factor in their retention.

Despite consistency with student departure theory, findings from this study point to some cautions in using the theory. A number of studies have indicated a revision of student departure theory is needed to more fully understand the experiences of minority students at PWIs. Participants' discussions of living two cultures and reluctance to separate from home communities add support to the call for revision of the theory.

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Shanetta, while you may not understand, nor want to understand student development theory or the administrative issues facing higher education in the 21st century, this doctorate is as much yours as it is mine. Achievement of this milestone is only part of our testimony, I am confident God has much more in store for us. I pray that we remain faithful and draw nearer to God each day. We have come too far to give up – Our greater is coming!

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Far too many undergraduate students leave American higher education without a degree. Among college-goers, there is a marked difference between enrollment and degree attainment of men and women of all races (Carey, 2005; Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2011). Across the U.S., women are outpacing men in both enrollment and degree attainment. When the conversation shifts from focus on disproportionate enrollments to discussion of degree attainment one thing is clear. Black males are the least retained undergraduates, and have the lowest baccalaureate degree completion rates in the country (Harper, 2009, 2012). Despite this reality, a number of Black men persist to earn undergraduate degrees. This study offers findings and recommendations to increase undergraduate retention and degree attainment, especially for Black males.

Undergraduate degree completion challenges, particularly for Black males, have swelled from a complex postsecondary education issue to a matter of national concern. The challenge of increasing undergraduate degree attainment has been one of the top issues in America. Recognizing the implications for the future of the country, President Obama declared a goal for the United States of America to return to graduating the largest proportion of college-educated citizens by the year 2020 (American Association of State Colleges and Universities [AASCU], 2010).

While degree attainment challenges have risen to the level of national attention, the problem is getting attention on individual campuses too. Results from a survey of over 850 senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) from colleges and universities across the United States indicated, “diminishing resources, changing student demographics, and

graduation rates were reported to be among the top issues facing college and universities” (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014, p. 5). These findings point out undergraduate degree completion is a matter of concern at the institutional level too.

Background

Far too many undergraduates entering the doors of American higher education exit without a degree. Figure 1.1 illustrates a snapshot of undergraduate degree completion by race and ethnicity at four-year public institutions.

Figure 1.1 Four and Six-Year Degree Attainment by Race/Ethnicity

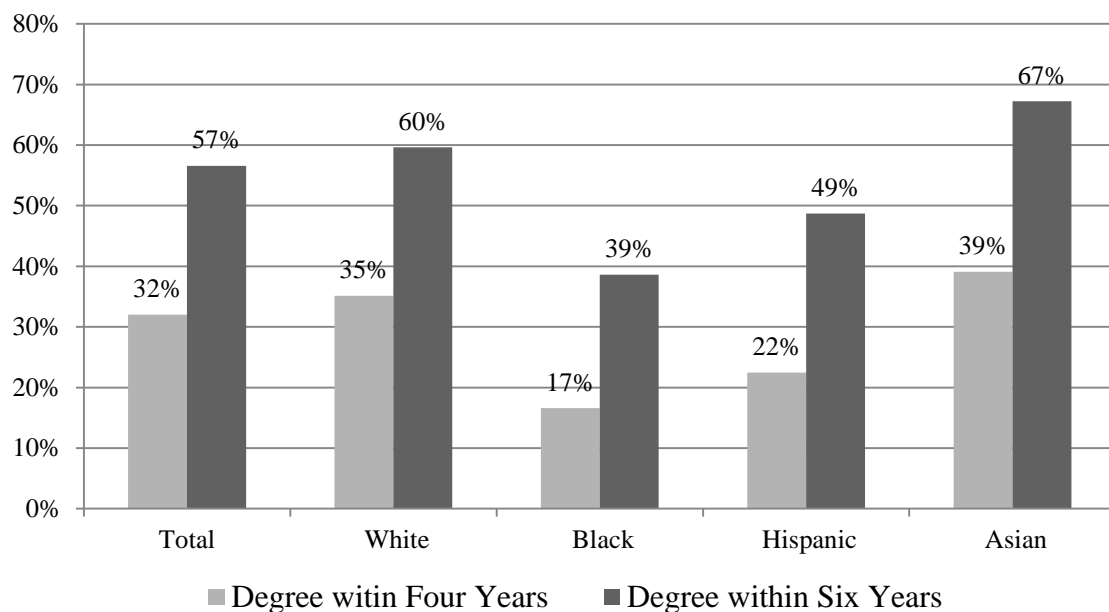


Figure 1.1. Percentage of Degree Attainment for First-time, Full-time Bachelor’s Degree-Seeking Students at 4-Year Public University or College Within Four and Six Years – Cohort Entry Year 2005.

Degree-granting institutions grant bachelor’s degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Completion rates refer to students receiving bachelor’s degrees from their initial institutions of attendance only. Totals include data for persons whose race/ethnicity was not reported. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012a

Cursory review of postsecondary education data demonstrates this sample is representative of historical undergraduate degree attainment trends, especially at four-year public institutions. Analysis of the data in the previous figure shows room for overall improvement in undergraduate degree attainment. In addition, these data allude to serious implications for the future of America and her citizens.

If increased postsecondary degree attainment is a vital requirement for the advancement of America and America's citizens (Museus & Quaye, 2009), an immense danger lies ahead. That is, despite presidential declarations, the wealth of research on degree completion, and higher education institutions' responses to existing research, there has been little change. The percentage of students retained and percentage of degrees completed in American higher education has remained virtually unchanged for decades (Astin, 1977, 1984, 1987, 1993; Harper, 2012, Seidman, 2005a, 2005b; Tinto, 1987, 1993, 2006). More importantly, Davis (2004) pointed out, "The gap is widening between who enters and who graduates" (p. 1).

Data from Figure 1.1 identifies an additional component to the challenge surrounding higher education and American society. That is, Black, Hispanic, and Native American students earn college degrees at disturbingly low rates. This is of significance to the future of American higher education, particularly when considering shifting demographic patterns. Seidman (2005b) wrote, "college enrollments are also becoming more ethnically [and racially] diverse as a result of these changing patterns" (p. 7). While, historically access to American higher education was a privilege for select citizens; this is no longer the case (Thelin, 2004). Today groups historically underrepresented have access to higher education. More and more students, specifically

minority students, are entering the doors of predominantly White institutions, or PWIs (NCES, 2011b). As Cook and Córdova (2007) noted from 1994 to 2004 overall higher education enrollment increased by 3 million students. This included a nearly 50 percent growth in minority student enrollment, bringing minority student enrollment to approximately 4.8 million students. These demographic changes represent a growing issue for higher education and American society.

While the data in Figure 1.1 are helpful, they do not fully show degree attainment challenges. Again, we know that nationally undergraduate men graduate at lower rates than their female counterparts (Palmer, et al., 2011). A closer look at degree completion data reveals even more alarming information. The six-year graduation rate of Black male undergraduate freshmen entering public four-year institutions in 2004 was 32.7% (NCES, 2011b). More recent data, shown in Figure 1.2, illustrates small improvement in the six-year degree completion rate for Black male undergraduates.

Figure 1.2 Bachelor's Degree Completion for Males

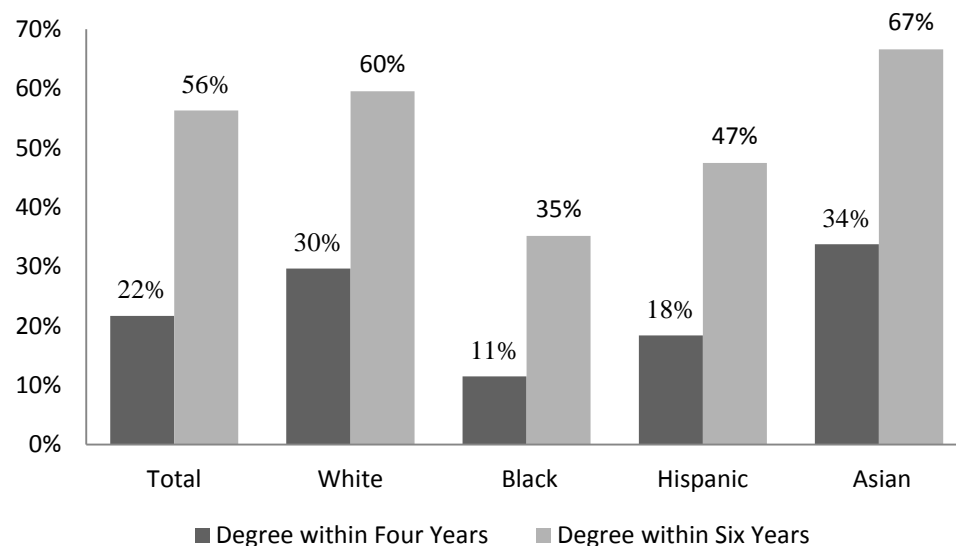


Figure 1.2. First-Time, Full-Time Degree-Seeking Male Freshmen US Public University or College Bachelor's Degree Completion - Cohort Year 2005
SOURCE: NCES, 2012a

The disaggregated data in Figure 1.2 reveal low rates of undergraduate degree completion for minority populations in general, and Black male undergraduates in particular. Despite significant attention provided to one of America's greatest conundrums there are still significant opportunities for improvement in postsecondary degree completion.

In order to address the challenge, there must be a close inspection of factors promoting or detracting from degree completion. Significant research (Astin, 1977, 1984, 1987, 1993; Harper, 2012, Seidman, 2005a, 2005b; Tinto, 1987, 1993) has grown from the desire to better understand undergraduate student retention. Among the findings, Tinto's (1987, 1993) conclusions regarding student retention and leaving behavior eventually led to his development of student departure theory. In sum Tinto (1993) concluded, "Departures are voluntary" and likely to occur when students do not become "integrated" in the college community (p. 136). He described integration is related to student experiences and interactions occurring both inside and outside the classroom. Tinto went on to label nonacademic and outside of class experiences *social integration*; whereas experiences occurring in class were deemed part of *academic integration*.

Persistence and Retention

While the national conversation centers on college degree completion (AASCU, 2010), the prerequisite matter of concern should be improving student persistence and retention. When it comes to student retention, Tinto (1987) declared, "There have been few problems in higher education which have received as much attention" (p. 36). Increasing undergraduate persistence and retention are essential for increasing postsecondary degree completion.

Erroneous use of the terms persistence and retention demonstrates the need to clarify both words. While persistence and retention are linked, by definition they are not the same and should not be treated as analogous. As Reason (2009) declared, retention and persistence are commonly incorrectly used to refer to the same concept. He noted, “Colleges and universities *retain* students”, while persistence is an “individual phenomenon” determined by students (p. 660). Therefore institutional retention signifies voluntary and continuous persistence and enrollment at one particular institution. The distinction of *voluntary* enrollment is an important factor in institutional retention, particularly when considering the majority of dropouts and stopouts are not forced to depart college because of academics.

Like persistence and retention, the terms dropout and stopout are deserving of explanation. Tinto (1987) noted “the label *dropout* is one of the more frequently misused to describe the actions of all leavers regardless of the reasons or conditions which mark their leaving” (p. 3). He went on to urge “caution” regarding how student attrition, or student leaving, is discussed (p. 23). Likewise, Tinto described “stopouts” might be a more applicable term to characterize some student leavers (p. 17). In some instances a student stops out from college, then later returns to earn a degree. As research indicates (see Cejda & Stick, 2008) undergraduates take various paths to degree attainment, which may include transferring institutions. Tinto (2012) added, “Many students persist to degree completion even though they do not do so in the institution in which they initially enrolled” (p. 128). In either case, returning stopouts and transfers are persisters. From an institutional perspective, neither stopouts nor dropouts are ideal; instead persistence and retention at the current institution is the most desirable track to degree attainment.

Statement of the Problem

Too many undergraduates, especially Black men, exit American higher education without a degree. As a matter of fact, among undergraduate populations, Black males are most likely to dropout prior to completing degree requirements (Harper, 2009, 2012). Decades of research on college students in America (Seidman, 2005b; Tinto, 1987, 1993, 2012) indicates the overwhelming majority of undergraduates choose to stopout or dropout. What's more, the majority of students purposely and voluntarily leave their institution for nonacademic reasons. Tinto (1993) stressed within higher education, "Less than 25 percent of all institution departures, nationally, take the form of academic dismissal" (p. 49). These declarations would point toward the notion that Black male undergraduates, and other dropouts, discontinue their postsecondary education despite being eligible to return.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore how social integration contributed to retention of Black male undergraduate persisters at one public Midwestern PWI. Tinto's (1987, 1993, 2012) assertion that students voluntarily leave institutions for nonacademic reasons gives credibility to providing focus on social integration of students academically eligible to persist. This rationale for concentrating on social integration of persisters informed the intent of this study. The investigator sought to understand how nonacademic and outside the classroom factors were believed to have contributed to Black male retention.

In many ways this research study can be inferred to question whether one Division of Student Affairs had an impact on Black male undergraduate retention. In one

sense, the researcher was interested in ways Student Affairs was perceived to influence Black male retention through social integration. As will be seen in an upcoming section centered on student affairs divisions, these units can be strongly linked to promoting or hindering social integration. Even still, there was no guarantee that social integration would emerge as a significant factor in the participants' desire to remain at the research site. Therefore the researcher maintained concentration on social integration and retention, with a tangential focus on student affairs.

This study is, in many ways, consistent with what other researchers have called for in retention research. For instance, Tinto (2006) proclaimed the need to know more about the integration experiences of traditionally underrepresented populations. He stated, "We need to know...the ways those experiences influence persistence, and more importantly the sorts of institutional and state actions that enhance their success in higher education" (p. 12). Reason (2009) concluded in his literature review, "increasing student persistence must be an institution-specific enterprise" (p. 678). This study not only gave focus to the experience of a traditionally underrepresented population, but also explored their experiences at one specific institution, as they relate to Student Affairs and a portion of student departure theory.

This desire to understand the lived experiences of undergraduate students shaped the need for a qualitative approach. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) pointed out, the goal of qualitative study is to "generate understanding", not to pass judgment (p. 38). Sticking with the tradition of qualitative methodology, rather than explicitly evaluating the successes and shortcomings of the Division of Student Affairs, the investigator wanted to understand how individuals perceived the impact of out of classroom experiences on their

commitment to earn a degree from the university serving as the research site. While the researcher is hopeful the findings from this study are helpful for many student affairs divisions, the intent was to better understand the experience of students least likely to be retained at one Midwestern PWI.

This study adds to research on increasing student persistence, retention, and degree attainment. The researcher sought to understand the impact (positive and negative) of participants' social integration experiences in relation to their retention. This included participants' lived experiences using student affairs facilities such as the multicultural center, student union, campus recreation center, and residence halls. Likewise, participation in programming offered by Student Affairs and involvement with student organizations was explored. Correspondingly, exploration of participant relationships with Student Affairs staff was also examined. Focus on each of these areas provides an understanding of student persistence and retention from the lived experiences of undergraduate persisters. More specifically, this study provides insight on Black male undergraduate persistence with a direct focus on social integration and a tangential focus on student affairs.

Research Question

The main question guiding this research was: *What meaning do Black male undergraduate persisters give to social integration and their retention at a PWI?* This primary question was crafted broadly by design, instead of centering on a specific type of formal or informal social integration. As Creswell (2007) suggested, the central question should be general and relative to the purpose of the study, but not as narrow as a quantitative research hypothesis. Since the central question is general, sub-questions (see

Chapter Three) helped add specificity to the research question. Prior to beginning the study, the research sub-questions were developed to help attempt to shed light on the potential connections between retention, social integration, and student affairs.

Student Affairs Divisions

Ideally, findings from this study on social integration will inform practical institutional action to increase student persistence, and thus grow institutional retention and improve graduation rates. Flanagan (2006) explicitly declared that creating and understanding an environment promoting social integration is an essential function of divisions of student affairs. On many campuses a division of student affairs would take the lead on providing institutional action for social integration initiatives. In the simplest terms, social integration could be described as one of the central responsibilities for student affairs.

On many campuses a division of student affairs commonly consists of several departments that provide “student services” extending beyond the classroom (Biddix, 2011, p. 444; Winston, Creamer, & Miller, 2001). In addition, student affairs divisions consist of services, programs, and people necessary to support the academic mission and academic experience. These services range from coordination of student activities, to providing facilities such as residential housing, multicultural centers, student unions, and campus recreation (Biddix, 2011; Butler, 2011; Kuk & Banning, 2009). Additional services include departments providing enrollment management functions, such as admissions, financial aid, and registration (Biddix); while on other campuses these units do not report to student affairs (Kuk & Banning). Overall, Kuk and Banning declared “there is no unit-driven definition or model of what constitutes student affairs” (p. 103).

Regardless of the unit structure, student affairs professionals are commonly identified within the student affairs community as practitioners. These practitioners consist of staff responsible for student services and programs centered on “students’ out-of-class life and learning” (Winston, et al. 2001, p. xi). Practitioners include the senior student affairs officer, dean of students, residence hall directors, multicultural affairs staff, and others.

The combination of student affairs functions and student affairs practitioners provides a strong connection to social integration. On many campuses, the division of student affairs has oversight for the out of class activities and environment deemed to promote social integration. On the other hand, these same units have the potential to detract from social integration, thus decreasing the likelihood a student will persist. Again, this study addressed the research question to identify if social integration was deemed to have had an impact on Black male undergraduate retention. In many ways this research study can be inferred to question whether Student Affairs at the research site had an impact on Black male undergraduate retention.

Methodology and Data Gathering

Data collection and analysis for this study was qualitative in nature. This section provides a cursory review of the qualitative methodology and data gathering procedures employed during this investigation. Further details about research methods for this study are available in Chapter Three.

Qualitative research. A phenomenological approach guided the qualitative data collection and analysis used for this investigation. To gather data from the students, qualitative inquiry and analysis was an applicable methodological approach to this study.

Nationally, quantitative approaches like the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) broadly report findings about students' out of class experiences. Yet, as Mullen (2010) described, these quantitative approaches fail to describe individual students' experiences. With so few Black male undergraduates persisting to earn a degree, we need to hear their story in their words. A qualitative approach, such as phenomenology provides opportunity to capture the lived experiences of the participants in this study.

Assumptions. In light of the site selected and the topic of research, there were certainly assumptions regarding this study. Bryant (2004) noted, "No research study is perfect in its design" and assumptions come with both qualitative and quantitative research investigations (p. 55). Overall, it was assumed student affairs is primarily responsible for social integration initiatives and provides programs, facilities, and services that attempt to promote acclimation to the university environment. Further, it was expected the questions used during semi-structured interviews were appropriate for identifying Student Affairs' role in social integration and retention. Equally important, the researcher assumed during the data collection process the participants in the study were truthful in sharing their experiences.

Delimitations and limitations. In addition to assumptions, this study had delimitations and limitations worth noting. One delimitation of this study, which is common with qualitative research (Bryant, 2004), is the ability to generalize results in the same manner one could with quantitative research findings. While the goal of qualitative research is not generalizability, Stake (2010) argued qualitative and quantitative works are both helpful in making generalizations. Along those lines, Winkle-Wagner (2009) described qualitative work does have potential "transferability" among comparable

populations (p. 178). Participants in this study may not be representative of the population of Black men on other campuses, or other Black men on their campus for that matter. Consequently, the findings of this study may or may not yield outcomes transferable to other Black male undergraduate students at other PWIs or other types of institutions. Therefore, the findings from this study are chiefly intended for understanding the experiences of the Black men interviewed in this investigation.

In regards to limitations, focus on one aspect of the campus and student departure theory presents a limitation to this study. Focus on social integration was a limitation because it ignores other elements of the campus and the theory, such as academic integration or experiences in the classroom. As Tinto (1993) made clear, a socially integrated student may have poor grades, thus leading to involuntary departure. Therefore academic performance or satisfactory grades, not necessarily integration, is unquestionably essential to student retention and persistence. At the same time, as Davis (2004) indicated, lack of social integration has negatively impacted plenty of students' "ability to accomplish their academic work" (p.47). Likewise, social integration can stimulate academic integration (Griffin, 1992; Tinto, 1987, 1993). To be clear, for this study, discussion of academic and social integration assumed each student met academic performance requirements to remain eligible to return to the institution.

At the same time, exclusive concentration on social integration within campus environments was justified. Focus on social integration was not meant to detract from the significance of academic integration. Instead, emphasis on social integration assists the field of student affairs by identifying out of class experiences influencing student persistence and institutional retention. So, although this study focused on one element of

student departure theory, there was still an overall connection to the whole theory and the larger campus community.

Even with these limitations, this study should be of great significance to multiple stakeholders, including postsecondary educational leaders, student affairs, policymakers, researchers, and American society in general. This study tells the lived experiences from men rarely heard from in higher education research. As the next section explains, this study is significant for a multitude of reasons.

Significance of the Study

“No country, however rich, can afford the waste of its human resources.”

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

The quote by President Roosevelt (as cited by Valverde, 2003, p. 19) captures a major element of this study’s significance. At the same time, the significance of this study extends beyond the benefit of the country writ large. This study is significant for three major areas, including American society and its’ citizens, postsecondary institutions, and research on student retention and persistence.

Public and individual good. The significance of this study to America and individual citizens is crystal clear. Again, Museus and Quaye (2009) claimed postsecondary degree attainment is a critical requirement for the advancement of America and America’s citizens. They cited forecasts claiming that soon nearly “80% of all high school graduates will need some higher education to achieve economic self-sufficiency and navigate the increasingly complex cultural, social, and political environments they will encounter” (p. 68). At the same time, in order to reach the President’s 2020 goal (AASCU, 2010), it is clear efforts to increase Americans’

postsecondary degree attainment of all students must be intensified; especially for America's least retained population. America cannot afford to waste the potential talents and positive contributions of Black men entering higher education institutions (Palmer, Davis, Moore, & Hilton, 2010).

Persistence, retention, and degree attainment of Black male undergraduates is significant to the future of American society. America is relying on the talent of its citizens. Neisler (1992) wrote, "Undereducated persons become a burden to society. The financial burden is obvious in terms of social service payments. But there may also be a moral and psychological burden" (p. 16). Specific examples of the greater societal impact of undergraduate student attrition can also be linked to individual benefits of college degree attainment.

The benefit of persisting and earning a degree is of grave significance from an individualistic perspective too. For example, college-educated citizens generally have more earning power, increase tax revenues, and are less likely to go to jail (Museus & Quaye, 2009; Seidman, 2005b). Expanding on earning power, Museus and Quaye emphasized college students who do not work and do not earn a degree lose wages. Basically, the time spent in college versus time that could have been devoted to earning money in the workforce contributes to decreased earnings. There is perhaps equally detrimental news for dropouts who accepted student loans while in college. These students have "accrued debt", and many waste "invested time in educational endeavors that do not result in the benefits that accompany a college degree" (p. 67).

Additionally, Museus and Quaye (2009) continued to describe economic impacts to individuals, and also went beyond finances when they stated, "forecasts suggest that, in

the near future, approximately 80% of all high school graduates will need some higher education to achieve economic self-sufficiency and navigate the increasingly complex, cultural, social, and political environments” (p. 68). Also relevant, Seidman (2005b) identified college graduates are generally healthier and “live longer” than those who do earn a college degree (p. 8). Clearly many benefits of a college degree are individualistic and also valuable to greater American society. As individuals, American citizens, including Black men, can ill afford to continue the current persistence, retention, and degree completion trends.

Higher education institutions. In addition to being broadly beneficial for American society and individuals, this study is specifically relevant for higher education institutions. As Museus and Quaye (2009), pointed out, “For higher education policymakers and practitioners to effectively serve increasingly diverse student populations with limited resources, they must better understand how to foster success among students of color” (p. 68). Findings from research on student success for minority undergraduates conveyed results of a national survey indicating students felt there is an imbalance of institutional focus on social and academic integration (Yazedijian, Toews, Sevin, & Purswell, 2008). Over 70% of students agreed their institution gave adequate focus on academics, while about four in ten students perceived the institution provided substantial support for social integration. Further, 31% of students wanted their institution to provide equal concentration on academic and social integration (p. 151).

Without a doubt the university or college has a role in promoting and providing opportunities for academic and social integration. While Tinto (1993, 2012) admitted students academically eligible to return to the institution are ultimately responsible for the

decision to leave their institution; he correspondingly identified the institution also plays a role in student retention, particularly when it comes to stimulating social integration. Therefore, from an overall institutional perspective, this study was significant because it built on a framework of previous research while providing an avenue for higher education institutions to understand the experiences and perceptions of their least retained population. The implications presented here are but a few of the many values this study has for higher education institutions.

Financial implications. The attrition of Black male undergraduates has several serious financial implications for higher education institutions. These implications are heightened by the early 21st century recessions, diminishing state support for higher education, and competition for resources. Malveaux (2005) described, “Fiscally, all but the best-endowed campuses are experiencing some financial challenges and competition for scarce resources” (p. viii). In a time of scarce and diminishing revenues higher education institutions cannot afford to simply overlook minority populations, including Black males.

The competition for resources has prompted policymakers to hold state supported colleges and universities more accountable for the funds these institutions receive (Titus, 2006). In some cases higher education is given the task of validating the financial support they receive by demonstrating the ability to graduate the majority of students they enroll (Flanagan, 2006; Seidman, 2005b; Strayhorn & De Vita, 2010; Titus, 2006). As more people watch how money to fund postsecondary education is spent, there are certainly others watching graduation rates.

As such, public postsecondary education institutions receiving state and federal funding should definitely pay attention to this study. Frankly, state appropriations and government support of public higher education has not been keeping pace with the increased costs of providing postsecondary education, compelling institutions to be more reliant on enrollment (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Paulsen, 2001, Titus, 2006). Nearly a decade ago it was estimated American colleges and universities lost about \$1 billion a year from first year student attrition (Seidman, 2005b). With the cost of tuition climbing faster than inflation and nearly unchanged retention rates the amount of lost revenue is likely to have grown.

Although Black men represent only a small population of undergraduate enrollments, the financial implications of lost revenue cannot be ignored. The *Digest of Education Statistics* reported for Fall 2010 there were nearly 983,000 African American men enrolled in institutions of postsecondary education; representing a growth of over 400,000 students compared to Fall 2000 (NCES, 2011a). Loss of annual revenue from hundreds of thousands of students has serious financial implications for higher education institutions.

Student affairs. Within the institution, in many respects, the significance of this study is paramount for student affairs. Flanagan (2006) noted, creating and understanding an environment promoting social integration is a vital role of importance for student affairs practitioners. As Tinto (2006) argued, when it comes to retention what is needed is a step beyond theory and research. He went on to share, what institutions and their leaders need is a practical approach, a way to implement research findings to enhance retention (p. 6). Again, on many campuses student affairs are and will be tasked

with facilitating social integration and acclimation to the university environment. This study gives student affairs on one campus the opportunity to peer into the lived experiences of Black male undergraduates that have persisted and retained at the institution. Findings from this investigation should help with providing practical guidance for maintaining, creating, and restructuring programs, facilities, and services provided by student affairs.

For student affairs, the significance of this study is overwhelmingly exemplified in several more instances. For example, this study has direct implications for one of the top issues mentioned by over 850 SSAOs (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). Likewise, this study has indirect significance for issues related to finances and growth of minority populations. Both of which were regarded among the top institutional and student affairs issues in Wesaw and Sponsler's report.

The task of shaping the out of class environment provides another example of the relevance of this study to student affairs. Kuh (2009) articulated, that student affairs needs to shift the previously "dominant institutional philosophy" whereby the institution depends on the student to adapt to the campus. He went on to demand student affairs to "cultivate campus cultures that welcome and affirm students" (p. 696). The institution, and more specifically student affairs, has a duty to create such cultures and environments for all students.

This investigation of social integration experiences provides insight on how Black male undergraduate persisters value the culture and environment under the purview of student affairs. Kuk and Banning (2009) described student affairs and student affairs leadership are "a critical link to student success and the quality of the overall educational

experience provided by higher education institutions” (p. 95). Shaping ideal college environments that promote social integration is valuable in addressing America’s degree completion issue. Yet, many institutions have neglected to implement what we know about social integration. Perhaps Wolf-Wendel and Ruel (1999) said it best when they wrote “...American higher education has invested too much energy in chasing the ideal college student and not enough energy in creating the ideal college” (p. 44). As such, participants’ reports about retention and impact of social integration experiences should assist Student Affairs in creating the ideal college to enhance retention.

Student affairs can play a critical role in institutional effectiveness to enhance the likelihood of persistence, retention, and degree completion. As Tinto (2012) pointed out, “The success of an institution reflects the ability of its various programs to improve, endure, and scale up over time in ways that are systematic and aligned to the achievement of the same goal: enhanced student retention and graduation” (p. 82). The researcher is hopeful results of this study will aid student affairs practitioners and their institutions. This study aids Student Affairs by identifying environments, policies, and procedures to improve Black male undergraduate experiences that participants felt will increase retention and degree completion. Needs and concerns identified in past research (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014) suggests this study may have significance to the profession of student affairs and broader higher education. Although generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research, as a worst case scenario, the researcher is optimistic findings from this study assists in identifying practical applications to improve Black male retention and degree completion on at least one campus. Perhaps equally important, this study assists in filling a gap in research on America’s least retained population.

Research contribution. This investigation builds on work surrounding student persistence and retention literature, while also filling a gap in the research on minority student retention and persistence. Research (Astin, 1977, 1987, 1993, 1996; Kuh, 1991, 2009; Seidman, 2005a, 2005b; Tinto, 1993, 2007; Zhao & Kuh, 2004) has demonstrated out of class experiences, such as those provided by student affairs, has had positive impact on outcomes such as student persistence and retention. However, most of this research on out of class experiences and retention is not centered on minorities like Black male undergraduates at PWIs.

It was not until the 1990s when researchers increased focus on the study of individual identity groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education, such as Blacks (Renn, 2008). Shortly after the 1990s Eimers (2001) proclaimed “researchers have seldom specifically examined how the undergraduate student experience influences progress in college for different types of students” (p. 389). Nearly twenty years later Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) reported “there is a well-developed tradition of scholarship within college student affairs literature that explores the challenges encountered by Black students in higher education” (p. 312).

Contrary to this declaration by Guiffrida and Douthit, there is more work to be done. Even with increased attention on minority populations there is still a need for more research, particularly for Black men (Reason, 2009). Strayhorn (2013), echoed, “Given the sheer number of Blacks attending PWIs today, more information is needed to understand their current experiences and perceptions of campus environments” (p. 116). Equally important, researchers need to go beyond exploring challenges facing Black male undergraduates. There needs to be more research to identify and understand positively

impactful experiences for minority persisters, especially for Black undergraduate persisters. This study adds to retention and persistence research by seeking to better understand the experiences of America's least retained population.

Essential Terms

Prior to moving further it is essential to identify terminology common in retention literature and utilized throughout this paper. The main essential terms are those involving race and ethnicity. As Shelly Tochluk (2010) indicated, the terms used to identify races, such as *students of color* and *minority student* are bothersome (emphasis added). She went on to say, "I find no other way to move forward except to use these imperfect categorizing terms until some new language or approach arises" (p. vii). To date new socially acceptable categorical terms describing race have not yet emerged.

Black/African American – It is important to note Black and African American are utilized interchangeably in both the literature and this document.

The American Psychological Association (APA) Publication Manual (2010) directed, "Racial and ethnic groups are designated by proper nouns and are capitalized. Therefore, use *Black* and *White* instead of *black* and *white*..." (p. 75).

The researcher uses the term Black as prescribed by the APA, and in the same manner as Davis (2004). Davis indicated, "*Black* is the term I use when talking about the heterogeneous group of students of the African diaspora" and "Black also includes, but is not limited to, people who are African American, Caribbean born, European born of Black parents, and Biracial persons with African heritage" (p. 4). Multiracial students, or students with more than two races identifying as having African heritage will also be identified in this study as Black. Similarly, a student that self-identifies as Hispanic (ethnicity), and Black (race) will be identified in this study as Black.

Minority Student – For this document, the terminology *minority student* is used in reference to students from races and ethnicities traditionally underrepresented in American higher education. This includes students identifying as Black or African American, Native American, and Latino or Hispanic. The phrase

minority student implies students identify as members of a domestic minority ethnicity and/or race.

Although Asian Americans are among a minority race in America, on the whole Asians are not underrepresented in American higher education. As such, Asian students are at times excluded from the conversation regarding underrepresented students. Additionally, Asian students tend to have the highest retention and graduation rates among all undergraduates. Such success has, in several cases, unjustly earned Asian students the moniker of “model minority” (Tochluk, 2010, p. 23).

Students of Color – Students of color and underrepresented students are also terms synonymously used to describe minority students.

PWI – American higher education institutions where half or more of enrollment is comprised of students racially identifying as White are predominantly White institutions, or PWIs. Some literature (e.g., Davis) also uses variations within PWI, such as using predominately instead of predominantly, and selecting not to capitalize White. PWIs are also referenced in the literature as predominantly White campuses, or PWCs. Finally, others (see Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002) also describe these institutions as traditionally White institutions, or TWIs.

The terminology provided in this section should assist with clarifying racial and ethnic identifiers. While each of these terms may not appear in this chapter, these terms are helpful to understand the nomenclature akin to this research genre.

Summary

The quest for increased undergraduate degree completion has placed a heavy weight on American higher education (AASCU, 2010). This study should lessen some of the weight by identifying how student affairs might consider the role of social integration initiatives to support or hinder Black male student retention at one PWI. This study utilized Tinto’s (1987, 1993) student departure theory to frame the links between social integration, Black male undergraduate retention, and student affairs.

While findings from this study may not be generalizable nor mandate governmental or institutional action, the results provide an avenue to discuss student

affairs' contribution to enhancing undergraduate persistence, retention, and degree attainment. Findings from this study might brighten America's future, while also advancing student affairs and the institutions served by student affairs. As Flanagan (2006) noted, SSAOs must be concerned with creating and understanding an environment promoting social integration. Again, ability to transfer the findings of this study must be considered as limited. However, it behooves individuals (SSAOs, policymakers, students) and greater American society to attempt to create situations to enhance persistence, retention, and eventually degree attainment.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides selective review of literature relevant to this study. As stated earlier, the purpose of this study was to identify how social integration influenced retention of Black male undergraduate persisters. This investigation increases the knowledge base on undergraduate student persistence and retention, with particular attention given to student affairs' and America's least retained students.

Before discussing specifically how findings from this study adds to research on this matter it is essential to understand literature framing works regarding student retention and persistence exists. A combination of over 50 books, peer-reviewed articles, doctoral dissertations, and conference presentations not cited in this chapter informed this literature review. The redundancy in information reviewed, familiarity with primary scholars in this field, and knowledge of current research signaled time for the researcher to form a comprehensive review (Bryant, 2004). Candidly, there is a lot to digest on the subject of student retention. Seidman (2005b) wrote, "Retention literature in the United States goes back to at least the beginning of the twentieth century" (p. 9). With this in mind, the forthcoming review is a mostly comprehensive review, as an exhaustive review from early 20th century to the present is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Discussion of previous works surrounding retention begins with outlining the theoretical framework used to guide this study. This is followed by a review of relevant literature focused on retention, persistence, and Black male undergraduates at PWIs. The review of literature includes support and caution for using student departure theory.

Theoretical Framework

Empirical research on student retention and persistence provided the theoretical framework for this investigation. An exploration of retention and persistence would be debatably incomplete without mentioning Vincent Tinto's (1987, 1993) student departure theory. Tinto's theory "has been described as one of the most comprehensive and validated models of college retention" (Guiffrida, 2003, p. 304). In sum, Tinto sought to explain why students voluntarily leave postsecondary education.

The following description of student departure theory is meant to provide a basic explanation. Those seeking more particulars about the theory are encouraged to gain further insight through directly reviewing Tinto's works. This section gives detail to key factors, stages of the theory, and cautions and critiques of the theory. While Tinto's theory is widely utilized and has been validated, there are some warnings worthy of being shared. On the other hand, despite cautions and critiques, student departure theory is one of the best explanations for student persistence and retention available to date.

Student departure theory. Tinto (1987, 1993, 2003) sought to provide a framework to explain causes for voluntary student departure. With his findings he also posited the inverse; that is, Tinto hypothesized why students choose to persist and how institutions can retain their students. Prior to the early 1990s, there was a lack of research depicting the difference between students discontinuing their enrollments. In 1986 Tinto (reprinted in 2003) shared, "For the most part, our current theories of departure, with several notable exceptions, continue to treat all leaving as dropout and therefore as reflective of some form of personal failure" (p. 146). This recognition by Tinto spurred exploration to understand why undergraduate students chose not to remain enrolled.

Perhaps equally important, this assertion identified postsecondary educational institutions shared a role in whether a student returned.

By 1987 Tinto had published *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, which he later revised and updated in 1993. Tinto (1993) credited several previous works as the reason for the refinement of his theory. Most notably, Tinto gave credit to the refinement of his theory to “empirical tests of its validity” and Spady’s use of suicide theory (p. 213). He argued suicide and stopping out of college “represent a form of voluntary withdrawal from local communities that is as much a reflection of the community as it is of the individual who withdraws” (p. 99). The connection to suicide theory alludes to the argument Tinto sought to make regarding the student departure process. That is, some people choose to leave their community by way of taking their life. In an analogous way, some students choose to leave the higher education community because of nonacademic reasons.

In addition to linking Spady’s work on suicide, the use of Van Gennep’s work on rites of passage is also present in Tinto’s (1993) theory. Van Gennep’s research focused on “the process of establishing membership in traditional societies” and “focuses on the movement of individuals from membership in one group to that in another” (p. 91). Based on this, Tinto reasoned rites of passage are applicable to the college environment and student departure. The combination of works by Van Gennep and Spady steered Tinto toward a theory for student departure from higher education. Overall, Tinto summarized two overarching integration factors influence the likelihood a student will leave the institution.

Academic and social integration. After years of research, Tinto (1987, 1993) described there are two key influences associated with intentional student departure. As Kuh and Love (2000) described, “In Tinto’s (1993) theory of student departure two constructs, academic and social integration, represent the process of student acclimation to institutions” (pp. 196-197). Tinto (1993) theorized scarce “[p]ositive” academic or social integration as top reasons most students choose not to persist (p. 113). In short, he felt students choose to return or not return to their institution because of academic and social integration.

Largely, academic and social integration happen in somewhat distinct places within the campus environment. Academic integration primarily occurs in two types of places, while social integration globally occurs in many places. For instance, Tinto (1993) pointed out academic integration includes student interactions with professors in classroom and lab settings (p. 105). On the other hand, social integration describes how students function outside of the classroom environment, in both “formal and informal” situations (p. 118). With social integration formal opportunities exist by way of co-curricular (Tinto called this extracurricular) activities organized or sanctioned by the institution (Tinto, 1993). Informal interactions happen in places such as residence halls and various other non-academic classroom settings (p. 106). These interactions might be between students and also involve student affairs practitioners. In both cases, whether a student remains enrolled through degree completion or voluntarily leaves, integration was the main factor.

Though described separately, Tinto (1993) shared academic integration and social integration are not mutually exclusive, or “totally independent of one another. Quite the

contrary, they are mutually interdependent” (p. 118). In addition, he placed a lot of stock in the relationship between intentions to persist and integration. Describing the positively correlated relationship, Tinto wrote, “Generally, the more satisfying those experiences are felt to be, the more likely are individuals to persist until degree completion.

Conversely, the less integrative they are, the more likely are individuals to withdraw voluntarily prior to degree completion” (p. 50). Tinto identified academic and social integration were likely to be facilitated within three stages of the college career.

Ultimately, Tinto used the same terminology as Van Gennep’s rites of passage to describe these three stages. That is, he stated “stages of separation, transition, and incorporation” are the three phases college students go through prior to voluntarily discontinuing their higher education career (p. 94). Each of these phases is briefly explored next.

Separation. The first stage discussed in the student departure theory is separation from the past (Tinto, 1993). The separation stage includes leaving behind behaviors and social norms from past communities that are not congruent to behaviors and norms in the college community. “For virtually all students, separation from the past is at least somewhat isolating and stressful”, yet some can overcome these feelings better than others (p. 96). Tinto proposed for students to increase their chances of persistence, “in varying degrees”, the student needs to physically and socially detach his or herself from the non-college community (p. 95).

Tinto (1993) argued the absence of separation from past communities increases the challenge of becoming socially integrated. In turn this lack of separation decreases the likelihood a student will persist. However, such a declaration assumes the student’s

past community has norms incongruent with those requisite of being successful in the campus community.

Transition. The second stage in student departure theory, the transition stage, is another step toward or away from retention (Tinto, 1993). The transition to college stage is a point where the student is in limbo between stages one and three. Tinto described the student in transition no longer exhibits characteristics from his or her former community, yet the student is not fully part of the new college community. In this stage the student needs to be able to handle stressful situations as they relate to moving into the college community; which includes change like separation. Tinto pointed out at the “‘typical’ institution” transition is another stage generally more difficult to handle for minority students (p. 97). In this stage social integration is not as influential in the decision to persist as “inability to withstand the stresses that such transitions commonly induce” (p. 98). That is, social integration is valuable, but this is the stage where many students make the decision to voluntarily withdraw because of the stress of transitioning from an old world into a new one.

Incorporation. The third and final stage, incorporation, is the ideal for increasing persistence and retention. If a student moves into the incorporation into college stage the chances of being retained are increased, yet “persistence is still not insured” (Tinto, 1993, p. 98). Typically students in the incorporation stage assume behaviors and norms appropriate to college life and the college community while establishing membership in the social and intellectual (or academic) college community. A student entering this stage may have gained, or already owned, cultural and/or social capital valuable for social integration into the campus community.

Though not originally intended for higher education settings, college cultural and social capital are fairly simple concepts. Basically, cultural capital can be seen as appreciation for certain tastes and social capital includes access to various connections and social networks (Martin & Spenner, 2009). Strayhorn (2010) found acquisition of social and cultural capital “could be seen as leveling the playing field” for minority populations, particularly Black men (p. 325). Winkle-Wagner (2010) described “it is not enough to simply *acquire* the skills, knowledge, or competence”; the individual has to know how to utilize and exchange their capital (p. 70). Therefore, owning and utilizing cultural and social capital to assist in integration is beneficial for students in general and minority students in particular. In summary, incorporation into the campus community is the end goal for institutional retention.

Cautions and critiques. As with most theories, there are certainly cautions and critics of application of the theory. In regards to student departure theory there are two warnings worthy of noting in this review of literature. First, as a self-disclosed caution, Tinto (1993) advised the stages of student departure are not as fluid or “clearly sequenced” as his model appears (p. 95). In other words, not every student moves from separation to integration in a linear process. Second, some critics have argued student departure theory is not fully, nor partially, applicable to ethnic minority students. As Guiffrida (2005) shared, “Although Tinto’s (1993) model is among the most widely cited for understanding the student departure process, questions have arisen regarding the applicability of the model to students of color who attend predominantly white institutions” (p. 49).

Student departure theory does not lack detractors. In some cases, critics support use of the theory, but with modifications for minorities. On the other hand, some all-out disagree with the merits of the theory for minority populations. The following examples provide glimpses of both stances on the inapplicability of student departure theory for ethnic and racial minority student populations.

Kuh and Love (2000) expanded on Tinto's (1993) work regarding retention and persistence and proposed eight factors impacting minority student persistence. They summarized these factors as:

Proposition 1 emphasizes the role of the individual in understanding and engaging with an institution's culture. That is, while culture is a product of a group's or organization's history and daily life, individuals carry and interpret culture.

Propositions 2 and 3 acknowledge that students have different cultural backgrounds (cultures of origin) and that colleges and universities are made up of multiple, overlapping cultures. Propositions 4, 5, and 6 articulate the concept of cultural distance, which accounts for many of the challenges students face when they go to college. Finally, propositions 7 and 8 address the process of cultural connections that are necessary to succeed in college. (pp. 200-201)

Kuh and Love agreed student departure theory had merit for minorities, but with modifications that account for the role of culture.

While some support modifications to the theory to account for underrepresented student experiences, others plainly do not support use of the theory for minorities. For instance, Allen (1992) concluded Blacks at PWIs learned how to be academically successful and persist in spite of not being socially integrated. Tierney (as cited in

Guiffrida, 2006) described Tinto's use of separation phase that was drawn from "Van Genneep's (1960) transitional model...is not applicable to minority college students" (p. 451). Tierney went on to argue "this mistaken extraction of Van Genneep's theory was potentially harmful to minority students because it encouraged their separation from cultural traditions and supportive relationships (pp. 451-452). Multiple scholars (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Museus & Quaye, 2009) have found minority students who have not separated from past communities have not suffered. They are able to keep connections to their home community and not drop out.

Response to cautions and critiques. It seems detractors of Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory ignored the 1993 revision which included cautions and critiques Tinto self-disclosed. The revision clearly included recognition of differences among student populations and institution types. In fact, the revised theory speaks directly to the criticisms aimed at the application of student departure theory relative to minorities. More specifically, Tinto (1993) wrote, "the departure of students of color arises from a somewhat different mixture of events than that of majority students, and that patterns and roots of departure among commuting colleges are not identical to those observed among residential institutions" (p. 83). Tinto gives credence to the various ways minority populations are impacted differently than their White peers.

Giving further attention to his theory's relevance for minorities, Tinto (1993) stated minority students had greater challenges with the first stage, or separation, than their White peers. He argued separation is likely "more painful" for minorities; noting minorities may have to give up cultural norms that are incongruent to a higher education environment (pp. 96-97). Perhaps more important than the stages themselves, Reason

(2009) pointed out when it comes to student departure theory, regardless of background and racial identity “students’ interactions with their environments matter” (675). In this regard, Reason is not alone in support of Tinto’s theory in relation to minority student persistence and retention. Both argue institutional environment leave an impact on retention.

Continuing to challenge the application of student departure theory, Palmer, et al. (2011) pointed out Tinto’s (1993) theory is applicable to minority student populations, but each stage may not always completely fit. As Kuh and Love (2000) hypothesized, it is possible that conflicting findings for support of Tinto’s use of academic and social integration could be the result of the methods used to identify integration. They followed this point stating, “Perhaps survey items developed to measure these [social and academic integration] constructs do not capture the complexities and subtleties of the interactions between students and institutions that affect persistence” (p. 197). This possibility of methodological reliability is worthy of keeping in mind as one reflects on the cautions and critiques of Tinto’s theory, as well as when considering alternatives to student departure theory. While responses to cautions and critiques regarding student departure theory might cool the embers of distrust in Tinto’s (1987, 1993) theory on student leaving behavior, there are also a multitude of alternative models and theories worthy of consideration.

Alternative models and theories. The connection between integration and voluntary student persistence is paramount to student departure theory; and this connection can also be closely linked to other studies. Despite widespread use of student departure theory, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) devoted an entire chapter to describe

theories and models focused on behaviors of 18-24 year-old college students. While the authors confess they do not to go beyond summarizing several theories, they do provide an adequate overview of a number of theories and models, including student departure.

Similarities to integration. Plenty of other research is comparable to Tinto's (1987, 1993) premise of why college students do not persist to graduation. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) identified work similar to student departure theory as part of a cluster of theories and models labeled "*college impact*" (p. 18). The basic function of impact theories and models is to identify change during college. Change "implies no directionality, whether regression or progression" (p. 18). These theories are concerned about "sources of change (such as different institutional characteristics, programs and services, student experiences, and interactions with students and faculty members)" (p. 19). They identified three similar models. Table 2.1 displays the college impact cluster, and includes specific widely recognized and highly-regarded theories and models that are under the umbrella of college impact.

TABLE 2.1

Sample of College Impact Theories and Models of College Student Change

COLLEGE IMPACT CLUSTER	
<hr/>	
Astin's I-E-O Model and Theory of Involvement	
Tinto's Theory of Student Departure	
Pascarella's Model for Assessing Change	
Weidman's Model of Undergraduate Socialization	

Note. Details of each theory and model are available from "How College Affects Students" by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005).

Again, college impact theories place focus on “change associated with the characteristics of the institutions students attend (between-college effects) or with the experiences students have while enrolled (within-college effects)” (p. 18). While Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) presented three alternative options to student departure theory, each option has the same reasoning. They also provided many other alternatives to student departure theories that are conceptually different from the college impact cluster.

Astin (1977, 1987, 1993, 1996), also identified elements of academic and social integration and interconnected linkages to student persistence. However, instead of describing his theory in terms of integration, Astin utilizes the term *involvement*. Pascarella and Terenzini stated, “Astin proposed one of the first and most durable and influential college impact models, the now familiar input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) model” (p. 53).

In brief an involved student, like an integrated student, is more likely to be retained at the institution. While similar to student departure theory, student involvement theory slightly differs in opinion about the value of pre-college attributes. Astin (1987) emphasized, a student’s pre-college attributes and their involvement during college were major factors in outcomes such as persistence, retention, and graduation. On the other hand, Tinto (1993) acknowledged pre-college inputs are a factor in outcomes; however he also argued these factors are generally not as influential as what students experience during college. Therefore, student departure theory is placing the weight of the outcome on integration, or what Astin would call involvement during college.

Recognizing Tinto's (1993) primary concern for what happens during college does not mean Astin (1993) was oblivious to the value of the experiences occurring in college. Astin acknowledged the value of college experiences when he wrote, "The lives and decisions of even students who take longer than four years to finish college are heavily influenced by what happens during the first four years" (p. xvii). Astin recognized the value of both pre-college and collegiate experiences. Despite using different terminology and giving differing weight to pre-college inputs, the similarities between student departure theory and student involvement theory are evident.

By the same token George Kuh, another influential scholar to the field of postsecondary education retention research, has offered explanations for why students do not persist to graduation. Much of his research and explanation of persistence and retention is centered on the concept of engagement (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, & Kinzie, 2008). Tinto (2006) acknowledged, today's use of the term *engagement* is congruent to his use of the term integration. Engagement, like involvement and integration, is identified in terms of in and out of class activities. Kuh (2009) explained, "Student engagement represents the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college *and* what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities" (p. 683). Similar to academic and social integration, both involvement and engagement are positively correlated to affect student persistence.

Developmental cluster. While not quite the opposite of college impact, developmental theories and models provide an alternative to student departure theory and similar models in the college impact cluster. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) explained, "The primary difference between the two families of theories lies in the relative degree of

attention they give to *what* changes in college students versus *how* these changes come about” (p. 19).

For instance, development is a process and a result that “implies or presumes growth, or the potential for growth” (p. 17). Therefore, development can be identified as a movement, ideally positive or progressive. In light of the identity with movement, Pascarella and Terenzini summarized, “This family of theories has been dominated by psychological *stage* theories, which posit one or another level of development through which individuals pass in a largely invariant and hierarchical sequence” (p. 18).

Table 2.2 illustrates the developmental cluster and categorizes (i.e., psychosocial and cognitive) each theory within the cluster.

TABLE 2.2

Sample of Developmental Theories and Models of College Student Change

DEVELOPMENTAL CLUSTER
Psychosocial Theories Chickering’s Seven Vectors of Student Development Identity Development (gender, race, sex)
Cognitive-Structural Theories Perry’s Ethical Development King & Kitchener’s Reflective Judgment Baxter Magolda’s Epistemological Reflection Model Gilligan’s Model of Women’s Moral Development

Note. Details of these theories and models, and additional theories are available from “How College Affects Students” by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005).

In light of the multiple options within each cluster, it seems there are many alternative paths to consider in lieu of using student departure theory.

Although this study could have been framed with a developmental theory, such an action may not have adequately addressed the research question at hand. More than likely, application of a developmental theory would have changed the intent of this research study. So, while there are certainly alternative theories worthy of consideration, there is a conceptual difference in developmental theories and models in comparison to college impact. This difference, reinforced the need to use one of (if not the) most popular college impact frameworks. Despite the alternatives, student departure theory seemed best suited to frame this study on Black male undergraduate social integration experiences within the PWI environment.

Minority Student Retention

Minority student retention, like overall student retention and degree attainment, has room for improvement. Many postsecondary education institutions, especially PWIs, have done a poor job of socially integrating and retaining minority students. Rankin and Reason (2005) identified minority students, at PWIs in particular, tend to report negative social integration experiences.

In light of these negative reports, PWIs cannot and should not leave social integration for minority students to chance. The following segment of this review provides some factors relative social integration and minority student populations. Many of these factors are within the scope of student affairs, so institutions do not have to leave social integration of minority students to chance.

Physical factors and facilities. In board terms, there are physical environmental factors impactful on persistence and retention. Hurtado, Dey, Gurin, and Gurin, (2003) stated the built environment, particularly on a college campus, includes physical factors such as buildings and statues. The majority of literature reviewed supports the premise that physical factors have impact on student persistence choices. In fact, having cultural center spaces and providing on campus living are deemed as part of best practices in student retention (Astin, 1977, 1987, 1993, 1996; Gaither, 2005; Patton, 2006; Seidman, 2005b). As such, discussion of various physical factors or structures within the campus environment is warranted.

Cultural centers. Multiple scholars (Griffin, 1992; Kuh & Love, 2000; Malveaux, 2005; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Patton, 2006; Renn, 2011; Seidman, 2005b) have validated a correlation between campus culture centers and minority student retention. Whether deemed mono-ethnic specific, cultural, or multicultural centers, these spaces are among the empirically supported physical factors demonstrated to positively impact minority student retention at PWIs (Patton, 2006, 2010). At the same time, some erroneously argue these spaces separate rather than integrate minority students into the predominantly White campus community (Howard-Hamilton, Hinton, & Hughes, 2010; Renn, 2011).

Despite opposition for campus cultural centers' value in supporting retention, findings have yielded these spaces do promote social integration and therefore persistence and retention. Renn (2011) argued these spaces might be separate, but they are "not separatist" (p. 253). As Kuh and Love (2000) wrote, these centers or their space provides "cultural enclaves" that promote opportunities for social integration (p. 206).

Seidman (2005b) identified the role of multicultural centers in providing a place of “solace” for minorities in the predominantly White campus environment (p. 19). Places of solace and cultural enclaves allow minority students to interact with cultures congruent with their home community, instead of separating from their past. Since these interactions happen on campus, this provides formal and informal opportunities for minority students to interact and socially integrate with peers. At the same time, culture centers are not the only physical factors that promote social integration and minority student persistence.

Residence halls. Beyond cultural centers, there are residence halls, student centers, and other non-academic physical facilities providing structure for formal and informal social integration opportunities (Astin, 1977, 1987, 1993, 1996; Griffin, 1992). In particular, the interactions that occur in residence halls have yielded significant data to support a correlation between social integration, student retention, and these facilities (Astin, 1977, 1987, 1993, 1996; Hurtado, et al., 2003; Kuh, 2009). Formal social integration can be facilitated through programming while informal integration can be facilitated through roommate and other peer interactions within the hall.

As researchers (Kuh, 2009; Tinto, 1987, 1993, 2012) have pointed out, a student living on campus should generally find it less challenging to become integrated. Tinto (2012) stated there are several reasons why living on campus promotes social integration, including the access to formal (e.g. learning communities) and informal social integration (i.e., roommate interactions). Also key, a student living on campus generally saves time not commuting to and from campus, thus allowing more time to become socially integrated into the campus environment.

Student organizations. In addition to physical structures, it is clear student organizations also provide minority students opportunity for social integration. Researchers (Astin, 1977, 1987, 1993, 1996; Guiffrida, 2003; Tinto, 1987, 1993) have widely supported the positive influence involvement in student organizations has had on undergraduate persistence and retention. Fischer (2007) conducted a quantitative study to measure outcomes for students involved in campus organizations at PWIs. Her investigation included the involvement experiences of a total of 3,924 students identifying as Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White. The sample included an oversampling from students identifying as Asian, Black, and Hispanic. Ultimately she concluded for students in general, and minority students in particular, involvement in student organizations yielded positive outcomes such as retention. Exploring Tinto's (1993) theory on student departure, Museus and Quaye (2009) found similar results to Fischer. They interviewed "12 Asian, 12 Black, and six Latina/o students", finding that these students' involvement in organizations provided a cultural enclave that supported persistence (p. 75).

Conversely, Guiffrida (2003) identified some African American students felt cultural enclaves and belonging to a Black student organization was not necessary for their social integration to the university. In fact, some African American college students reported initially feeling uncomfortable around other Black students because most of their high school friends were White. At the same time, "Most of the students who discussed involvement in African American student organizations as an important component to their social integration into the university described themselves as coming

from predominantly Black high schools” (p. 313). These findings lead to mixed reviews on the importance of ethnic-based student organizations.

With these mixed results, Guiffrida (2003) acknowledged belonging to a Black student organization supported social integration for many Black students, but not all. He concluded more research on Black student social integration at PWIs is necessary. Likewise Guiffrida called for student affairs to be “pro-active in connecting [Black students] with Black student organizations” as a means to promote social integration to the university (p. 316). Yet, he also acknowledged that student affairs practitioners should not assume all Black students have the exact same needs when it comes to social integration.

Black Student Retention

While there are plenty of common and transferrable experiences within the larger context of minority students, it is also important to delve deeper into individual identity group experiences. Along those lines, it is necessary to take a closer look at research on Black students. This is imperative because student retention is widely studied, yet the majority of the research regarding student retention omits the experiences of Blacks, especially men. Taking a closer look at Black student retention identifies challenges generally applicable to most minority students and noteworthy for Black men.

HBCUs vs PWIs. Taking a closer inspection of Black student retention requires an examination of institution types. Both historically and recently, “PWIs have not been as effective in supporting, and consequently retaining, Black students, especially when compared to predominantly Black institutions” (Rodgers & Summers, 2008, p. 172). Harper (2009) declared PWIs should “especially” concentrate on finding, creating, and

maintaining environments to enhance degree attainment of Black male undergraduates (p. 144).

The shift in college-going behavior of Blacks has prompted the need to know more about Blacks at PWIs. The fact is more Blacks enroll in PWIs than predominantly Black, or Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Specifically, in 2007 about 89% of Black college students did not attend a historically Black college or university (NCES, 2011b).

While the majority of Black students now attend PWIs, research findings reveal a difference in the Black student experience at PWIs in comparison to HBCUs. For instance, Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) interviewed 34 Black students to compare experiences between one HBCU and a TWI. They discovered the Black students at the TWI felt socially disconnected from campus, while students at the HBCU felt integrated and supported (p. 323). Also of interest, their investigation unintentionally discovered the majority of the participants at the HBCU had transferred from a TWI. Thus, Fries-Britt & Turner suggested perhaps voluntary departure for Black students at TWIs is due to a lack of academic and social integration (p. 318). Findings from their study are consistent with other studies (see Kimbrough & Harper, 2006) comparing social integration at HBCUs with PWIs. In other words, Black students at HBCUs report more consistent formal and informal social integration experiences than Black students at PWIs.

Deficit and token language. Identifying challenges for Black collegians is not intended to explicitly or implicitly classify Blacks from a deficit approach. Distressingly, a deficit approach has historically been part of discussion about minorities, both racially

and otherwise. For example, Kanter (1977) pointed out nearly forty years ago, comparison of minorities or “tokens” to the “dominants” was commonplace (p. 208). This same approach occurs today, as minority student retention literature commonly makes comparisons of the ethnic minority group with the majority, or White students. Although Kanter’s work on tokenism focused on women in comparison to men, Bennis (2004) described, “She is interested in marginalized roles of all types. You could substitute for women African Americans... [and they would] fit into her conceptual framework” (p. 106). Kanter’s work on tokenism is still relevant today, especially for Black men attending PWIs.

Within the body of retention research on Black males, the discussion is typically about how these men are not performing the same as White peers (Fries-Britt, 1998). These comparisons are done as though Whites are the norm and Blacks are abnormal. As Harper (2012) attested, existing empirical research on Black men is dominated by a deficit approach. This is seen whereby the focus is on what is wrong with Black men that contributes to their attrition and lack of degree attainment (Harper, 2009, 2012; McClure, 2006). There needs to be more research and reporting clear of deficit and tokenistic approaches to examining Black male retention, persistence, and degree completion.

Males. To date, Black male degree attainment matches the narrative for student retention as a whole. Again, there is room for improvement of Black male degree completion. For example, the six-year graduation rate of Black males entering public four-year institutions in 1996 was 30.3%, compared to 32.7% for the freshmen male cohort entering postsecondary education in 2004 (NCES, 2011b). In recent years the

proportion of Black male undergraduate degree attainment has remained virtually unchanged.

Imaginably, one might conclude the rationale for this stagnation in degree attainment rates is an issue of research or practice, or both. Harper (2013) described, many higher education institutions attempting to ameliorate attrition of minority men focus on race and ethnicity, thus neglecting consideration of their identities as men. Until recently much of the research and institutional action surrounding Blacks did not acknowledge there are differences between the experiences of men and women (Cuyjet, 2006). Cuyjet noted:

Although a particular effort to assist all African American students (perhaps even all underrepresented minority students) may have a positive effect across the entire population, student affairs professionals need to be open to the possibility that the same intervention may have a dramatically different impact on each gender group and that, in some cases, entirely different actions are needed. (p. 21)

In other words, student affairs practitioners must consider what may work to improve persistence, retention, and degree attainment for Black women, may not have the same results for Black men.

At the same time, Cuyjet's (2006) recommendation should extend beyond student affairs. Cuyjet's words should be a signal to researchers and policymakers concerned about the plight of Black males and American society. These words should be a call to attention regarding research and interventions neglecting differences between men and women. Frankly, there is a considerable gap between the graduation rates of all men and women of all races (Carey, 2005). Palmer, et al. (2011) pointed out women's enrollment

and degree attainment far outpaces that of men. For Blacks, in academic year 2009-10 males earned only 34.1% of undergraduate degrees (NCES, 2012b). In all, the data demonstrate there are differences in the degree attainment of men and women.

Additionally, the experiences of men and women also vary. On average college men, particularly Blacks, have a variety of integration experiences different than their female counterparts. For instance Black men are less likely, than Black females, to be plugged into the university community. This is particularly true when it comes to seeking support for “their personal and academic problems” (Harper, 2013, p. 7; Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010). Strayhorn and DeVita went on to outline several obstacles that Black men typically have to overcome within the American higher education environment. Major impediments included decreased likelihood for social and academic integration; such as reluctance to “seeking help, becoming involved in clubs and organizations, and establishing supportive relationships with faculty members, administrators, and peers” (p. 88).

Low levels of integration are common with men, and some try to suggest this should not be of concern. For example, after reviewing findings from a quantitative study of 408 first-time first-year students from eight different universities, Jones (2010) suggested seeking retention interventions for men that were less focused on social integration. Though the sample was skewed with 66% of the participants identifying as female, and lacked much representation from Black students, Jones found social integration had less impact on men than women (p. 697). At the same time, another quantitative research (Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek, 2004) has found Black women integrate to campus and use resources differently than their male counterparts. There is

little dispute that college men, especially Black men in college, could be more socially integrated.

For Black male undergraduates, reluctance to integrate into the campus community has been attributed to “cool pose”, whereby Black men purposefully ascribe to behaviors counter to social and academic integration (Cuyjet, 2006, p. 16). While cool pose may be real and men generally, Black men specifically, are less likely to be socially integrated into campus this should not signal for practitioners to allow men to disengage. While not as significant as women, Jones (2010) did identify, overall the relationship between social integration and men was positive. Rather than throw in the towel on social integration for men, more research is necessary to identify social integration experiences that are the most positively impactful to Black men.

At the same time, seeking impactful experiences for Black men requires consideration of an important fact. That is, while there are many similarities among Black male undergraduate experiences, their experiences are not homogeneous. Harper and Nichols (2008) asserted not all Black male students are the same and “it would be wrong to assume they all perceive or experience Blackness the same way” (p. 210). Their study indicated potential value for future research to consider learning about within group experiences between Black male students. In addition to varying within group experiences, there are also differing experiences by institution types.

Campus climate. While not intending to pit institutions against each other, it is clear campus climate for Black men at PWIs has tended to vary dramatically from experiences at HBCUs (Kimbrough & Harper, 2006). In their review of literature, Rankin and Reason (2005) found data that indicated minorities at PWIs question

“institutional support” for creating positive environments for minorities (p. 46).

Furthermore, Black men seem to report the most dissatisfaction with campus climate at PWIs. Harper, et al., (2009) declared “for over a century” Black students, chiefly males, have experienced racist and unsupportive environments at PWIs (p. 397). Malveaux (2005) stated “most PWIs have a history of either active or passive exclusion of African American students” (p. viii). The historical context of PWC climates must be considered when seeking to promote positive social integration experiences for Black males.

Further review of historical context and literature on PWI campus climate for Black men indicates more disturbing findings. For example, Strayhorn and DeVita (2010) concurred with the work of Fleming (1984) which acknowledged “Black men at predominantly White colleges feel unfairly treated by faculty members” (p. 88). Real, or perceived, unfair treatment and a lack of a supportive network contributes to the feeling of a “chilly” campus for Black men at PWIs (Strayhorn, 2013, p. 124). On the other hand, “warm and supportive” campuses promote a sense of belonging and provide an avenue for students to become socially and academically integrated (Rodgers & Summers, 2008, p. 177).

Linkages are clear when it comes to campus climate, perception, and the path to student leaving. A multitude of scholars (Baird, 2000; Strayhorn 2013), including Tinto (1993) agreed the campus environment and students’ perceptions impact student behavior, such as persistence. Tinto described, “The model takes seriously the ethnomethodological proposition that what one thinks is real, has real consequences” (p. 136). Strayhorn (2013) added that “*perception becomes reality*” (p. 125). Perceptions of campus environment have an impact on social integration and the choice to remain

enrolled, especially for minority students, like Black male undergraduates. At the same time, although numerous Black men face less than desirable campus climates at various PWIs, there are still many that persist.

Although HBCUs reportedly offer a more supportive campus environment for Black males, HBCUs are not the panacea for Black male retention and degree attainment. Kimbrough and Harper (2006) conducted qualitative research (at a conference sponsored by the National Association of Student Affairs Professionals) to learn about the challenges Black men at HBCUs faced outside the classroom. Their findings acknowledged HBCUs face similar challenges as PWIs, specifically as it relates to engaging the men in activities not deemed as “cool” (p. 203). Palmer and Maramba (2012) cited HBCUs, like PWIs, are working to improve Black male retention and degree completion. They went on to write, “Some have even implemented special programmatic initiatives” (p. 96). So, Black students face persistence, retention, and degree attainment challenges no matter the institution type. Rather than pitting institution types against one another, Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) suggested using best practices from multiple institutions.

Double-consciousness. Conceptually, there is explanation for how Black male undergraduates at PWIs persist and become socially integrated despite campus climate challenges. Rodgers and Summers (2008) found that Blacks were able to be socially integrated in the PWI community, “and also maintain cultural ties to the African American campus culture” (p. 182). They found Black students were able to conform to campus norms that may be unlike their Black culture. However, this conformity is done while maintaining, rather than abandoning, their African American heritage or separating

from the norms of their pre-college community. This concept described by Rodgers and Summers is quite similar to what Du Bois (2003) proclaimed as “double-consciousness” or “two-ness” for Blacks living in American society (p. 9).

Double-consciousness hypothesizes a person can live two separate lives as one. Double-consciousness allows a student to adopt norms of the college environment that are not necessarily consistent with the pre-college community. At the same time, when culturally proper, the student is able to switch back to the home community’s accepted norms. It seems double-consciousness has some resemblance of Tinto’s (1993) incorporation stage, yet omits acknowledgement of the separation stage. Guiffrida (2006) cited the failure to acknowledge the reality of double-consciousness is another shortcoming of student departure theory. In the end, double-consciousness allows opportunity to extend the conversation about Black male persistence beyond a deficit approach.

High-achievers. Thankfully, there is research describing successful Black male undergraduates, which extends beyond the deficit approach. However, there is a gap in research recognizing successful Black male college students (McClure, 2006). Within the narrow strand of existing research the focus has tended to target experiences and attitudes of Black male students recognized as academic “high-achievers” (Harper & Quaye, 2007, p. 132). The limited focus on high-achieving Black undergraduate students typically identifies those with cumulative grade point averages (GPAs) of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale (Fries-Britt, 1998; Guiffrida, 2005; Harper, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007).

In fact, Harper (2012) set out to take an anti-deficit approach to inform multiple stakeholders about the experiences of high-achieving Black males. This led to what he

proclaimed as “the largest-ever qualitative research study on Black undergraduate men” (p. 1). Harper’s study included 219 Black male undergraduates, each with a GPA of 3.0 or better. The men were enrolled at a total of 42 different institutions, including 30 PWIs. Harper described the experiences of the participants, highlighting the following categories; the pre-enrollment experience, financing college, getting integrated, and dealing with climate issues. His findings indicated consistency with Tinto’s theory. That is, each student was academically and socially integrated into their campus community. Ultimately, Harper advocated for more work to be done to understand Black male undergraduate persistence from the perspective of actual persisters (p. 25). Like Harper, others have provided attention to academically high-achieving Black male undergraduates.

Conversely, there are successful Black collegians not designated as high-achievers. As Harper (2013) pointed out, undergraduate Black men’s “grade point averages are among the lowest of all undergraduate students” (p. 3). While a common national dataset with information regarding the spectrum of GPAs for any student population is non-existent (however this information does exist at individual campuses), it would be safe to infer there are plenty of Black male college graduates without a GPA at or above a 3.0. Considering well-documented under preparation for college (Harper, 2012) it is reasonable to speculate there are and will be more African American male undergraduate students who will not be considered academic high-achievers.

Certainly, Black male undergraduates may be defined as successful and described in a variety of ways beyond GPA. As such, thus far this chapter has omitted description and identity of a significant subgroup commonly used to describe Black males. Members

of this group are certainly members of those identified as high-achievers, as well as part of the deficit and token discussion. Not mentioning this group of undergraduate Black males is like ignoring an elephant in the living room.

Athletes. The time has come to address the elephant in the living room of Black male retention. That is to say, Black men are unquestionably "overrepresented on revenue-generating" National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sports (Harper, 2012, p. 3). At many PWIs it is widely accepted minority students, especially Black men, are attending via athletic scholarship (Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013). However, contrary to popular belief, across the country the majority of Black men on campus are actually not athletes (Cuyjet, 2006). Case in point, Person and LeNoir (1997) found that slightly over 88% of Black male students attending four-year PWIs classified as Division I were not student-athletes.

At the same time, Cuyjet (2006) acknowledged on many campuses Black male athletes are actually the majority of the Black males. He posited, when this is the case or even appears to be the case, institutions "must redouble its effort to recruit and retain nonathlete African American men..." (p. 15). More importantly, for the athletes, Cuyjet asserted because of athletic obligations Black male student-athletes are less likely to be socially integrated within the larger campus community (p. 14). This implicates student affairs should collaborate with athletic departments to assist these athletes with social integration into the broader campus community.

Summary

This chapter provided a selective review of literature relevant to this study and undergraduate persistence and retention. As Tinto (1993) refined his ideas on student

departure he reviewed the works of several departure theories. While identified as a college impact theory, rather than a developmental theory associated with stages, Tinto's (1987, 1993) student departure theory describes stages (separation, transition, incorporation) a student goes through when deciding whether to remain enrolled. He argued these stages are fluid, and the ability to effectively integrate into the college community either formally or informally is associated with student persistence and retention.

The purpose of this study was to identify ways social integration was perceived to influence Black male retention. As this review revealed, Black male undergraduate persistence and retention at PWIs should be viewed from a lens that considers the intersecting identities as minorities and males. The research conducted for this study considered this lens and adds to the small amount of research focusing on the experience of Black male persisters.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Overview

This chapter is centered on the phenomenological qualitative data collection and analysis methods utilized for this study. The purpose of this study was to explore how social integration impacted retention of Black male undergraduates at a public Midwestern PWI. Once the investigator seeks to explore or understand meaning it becomes clear qualitative methods must be utilized, whether singularly or in conjunction with a quantitative method (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002, 2009; Stake, 2010). For this study, qualitative methods are the sole source of data collection and analysis. More specifically, among the many available options, the phenomenological approach was employed for this qualitative investigation.

Research Rationale

Selecting a qualitative approach for this study was clearly appropriate. There were multiple methodological options for conducting this research study, including a qualitative approach. In review of the literature on similar types of studies Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted quantitative studies have dominated and “continue to dominate” college impact research (p.636). Despite this dominance the researcher sought to gain a deeper understanding than what a quantitative approach would supply. On predominantly White campuses surveys have the potential of silencing or omitting the experiences of minority populations. On the other hand, as Creswell (2007) acknowledged, qualitative research can allow for silent voices to be heard (p. 40). In this case the researcher sought to understand social integration experiences within the domain

of student affairs, particularly from the perspective of the typically unheard and oft silenced voices of undergraduate Black male persisters.

Utilizing a qualitative approach to better understand the lived experiences of undergraduate Black male persisters was unquestionably the correct approach. Qualitative research, as Merriam (2002) explained, is not predictive like quantitative research. Instead, the goal of qualitative research is to “search for meaning and understanding” of phenomena through the eyes of the people living the experience (p. 6). Equally important, Guiffrida (2003) wrote, “College retention researchers have argued that quantitative measures of college student social integration have failed to identify the complexities involved in the social integration of minority students” (p. 305). In sum, qualitative research provides a meaning and understanding that cannot always be derived from quantitative methods.

Overall Approach

While it is clear a qualitative approach was appropriate for this study, it may be less clear which approach should have been utilized. Creswell (2007) pointed out, “Those undertaking qualitative studies have a baffling number of choices of approaches” (p. 6). Creswell summarized five qualitative approaches that he commonly found represented in his review of research (p. 9). These approaches included narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study research. Similarly, Merriam (2009) acknowledged there were an abundance of widely accepted approaches to qualitative research; she went on to identify six “more commonly used approaches” (p.21). Comparing the approaches outlined by both authors, Merriam cited each approach identified by Creswell and added critical qualitative research and the basic

interpretive approach. Although several of these approaches were appealing to consider for this study, the researcher sought to do a phenomenological investigation.

The phenomenological approach shares many characteristics of all qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). On the whole, phenomenology describes meaning for several individuals' "lived experiences" (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). These lived experiences are what Moustakas (in Creswell, 2007) referred to as "what" was experienced and "how" it was experienced (p. 58). The main goal of reading results of a phenomenological study is to paint a picture so vivid the reader would feel like they were living the experience. As Polkinghorne (in Creswell, 2007) shared, the reader should remark, "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" (p. 62). Findings from this study should give a sense of what out of class experiences are like as a Black male undergraduate at this PWI. Additionally, phenomenological reduction leads to a description of how these shared experiences were perceived to have impacted the desire to remain enrolled at the PWI.

Philosophical Assumptions

There are a few different philosophical assumptions consistent with qualitative approaches. Creswell (2007) acknowledged philosophical assumptions have also been called paradigms or worldviews. He went on to outline four paradigms, including "postpositivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism" (p. 19). These paradigms provide ontological and epistemological understanding of the phenomenological approach. Merriam (2009) defined ontology as "the nature of reality", whereas epistemology is "the nature of knowledge". Phenomenology, "assumes that

reality is socially constructed, that is, that there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event” (p.8).

Overall, constructivist worldview was the philosophical assumption guiding the phenomenological data collection and analysis for this study. This view recognizes multiple realities and is centered on understanding meaning based on “participants’ views of the situation” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). Creswell pointed out the constructivist paradigm is commonly represented with phenomenology.

Research Questions

In order to explore how social integration contributed to retention of Black male undergraduate persisters several research questions were developed. This included one central research question and four sub-questions. These questions guided data collection for this phenomenological study.

Central question. The central question guiding this research study was: *What meaning do Black male undergraduate persisters give to social integration and their retention at a PWI?* As suggested by Creswell (2007), this central research question was intentionally “broad” (p. 108). Because the central question is broad Creswell recommended developing research sub-questions.

Sub-questions. Creswell (2007) advised to narrow the central question because it should be broad, while sub-questions are more particular. He described sub-questions should be more specific “subtopics” that can help in answering the central research question (p. 109).

The research sub-questions for this study were intended to assist in understanding perceived impact of social integration by way of programming, facilities, and student

organizations managed by student affairs staff. The following four research sub-questions assisted in guiding this investigation.

Research Sub-Questions:

1. How do participants describe their social integration experience at the institution?
2. What social integration or nonacademic themes do participants attribute to their retention at a public Midwestern PWI?
3. How important or insignificant is social integration when described in relation to Black male undergraduate retention?
4. What social integration initiatives do participants believe student affairs should employ, revise, or remove to increase Black male undergraduate retention?

Chapter Six provides discussion regarding how answers to these questions provide some direction for implementation and continuance of programs and services to better increase potential for student retention, especially for Black male undergraduates.

Data Collection

One on one, face to face, semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method for this study. The semi-structured nature means some interview questions were predetermined and asked of all participants, while other questions were not predetermined and were developed as follow-up during each interview (Merriam, 2009). The semi-structured interview protocol questions (see Appendix C) were intended to understand these men's experiences and solicit information to address the research questions. These questions were refined by conducting pilot tests.

Pilot testing. Before collecting data for the actual research study, a pilot test was performed. Merriam (2009) noted, "Pilot interviews are crucial for trying out your

questions” to allow an opportunity for practicing interviewing techniques and addressing the mechanics of interviewing (p. 95). The researcher benefited from piloting the demographic questionnaire (Appendix B), testing questions to improve the interview protocol, and refining mechanics of qualitative interviewing.

Identifying participants. After pilot interviewing and prior to attempting to answer the research questions Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to begin data collection was obtained. Upon IRB approval the university registrar’s office was contacted to assist in identifying potential participants. The registrar’s office provided the secondary investigator with a list of currently enrolled men meeting the research criteria for this study. The secondary investigator used the list to send each student a recruitment email and encouraged follow-up with the primary investigator. Also, administrators at the research site were contacted to encourage qualified participants to follow-up with the primary investigator. Snowball sampling served as the final approach to identifying qualified participants. As men contributed to the study, each participant was requested to voluntarily ask other potentially qualified participants to contact the primary investigator. Researchers (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2010) have identified snowball sampling can be effective in finding potential participants meeting the study requirements.

Interviewing. Upon the men’s indication of interest to take part in the study a mutually agreeable interview location was selected. The overwhelming majority of interviews occurred in the main university library. Prior to each interview multiple efforts were made to convey participation in this research is voluntary. This included during scheduling the interview and at the outset of each interview via providing

participants a letter of informed consent (see Appendix A). Participants were instructed verbally and via the written consent form that they may withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences to them.

After receiving written consent participants were asked if they had any questions, then instructed to complete a brief demographic form (Appendix B). This form was used to learn more about the informants and maximize time spent for verbal communication during interviews. After obtaining this data, permission to audio record the interview was re-confirmed verbally and the first interview with each informant began with a question about experiences as a Black man on the campus.

Each interview focused on undergraduate experiences outside the classroom and open-ended questions about the desire to stay at the institution. First interviews were capped at no longer than 90 minutes and ranged from 39-90 minutes, with the average interview lasting nearly 70 minutes. For one participant a second interview was used to follow-up to the first interview. The second interview continued focus on outside of class experiences, and was capped to no more than 60 minutes. Upon completion of each initial interview each participant was assigned a pseudonym to keep their responses confidential.

Transcription. In addition to interviewer notes, each audio recorded interview was transcribed verbatim. A professional transcriptionist was hired to transcribe all interviews. Prior to transcribing any interviews the transcriptionist signed a transcriptionist agreement (see Appendix D) indicating information contained on audio recordings and in interviews received from the principal investigator are held in confidence with regard to the individual and institutions involved in the research study.

Sample Population

The sample selection for this investigation was purposive or purposeful. The researcher purposely sought to learn about the experiences of Black male undergraduate persisters. Going a step further, the researcher intended to learn about the experiences of Black male persisters that are rarely studied or discussed. In other words, the researcher wanted to learn about the experiences of Black male persisters that are not deemed academic high-achievers or student-athletes (the researcher recognized these strands are not mutually exclusive).

Prior to actually conducting the investigation the desired sample was Black men who had undergraduate GPAs below 3.0 and who are not NCAA athletes. At the same time, the researcher recognized that Black males represent a small minority at the institution. Therefore Black males with a GPA of 3.0 or higher and/or who identify as student-athletes were not excluded from participating in this study.

The rationale for a specific GPA criteria and non-athletic standing stemmed from seeking to understand the lived experiences of a population not typically explored within the strand of research on Black male collegians. The logic for not focusing on high-achievers was outlined in the previous chapter (i.e., the majority of collegians likely do not have a GPA of 3.0 or better). While the argument for limiting or possibly omitting the voices of Black male student-athletes may not be as clear, especially when considering factual and popular misconceptions about Black male involvement in college athletics.

Harper (2012) noted, African American men are "overrepresented" in NCAA Intercollegiate Athletics sports on college campuses like the research setting for this

study (p. 3). Likewise at many PWIs it is widely accepted minority students, especially Black men, are attending via athletic scholarship (Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013). In some cases this is true, in many others it is not. Person and LeNoir (1997) identified nationally nearly nine out of ten African American male students attending four-year PWIs classified as Division I (like the research setting in this study) are not student-athletes. Therefore, overrepresentation on sports teams is not always equal to the common misconception that most Black men on college campuses are there because of sports. Focusing on Black male college athletes without adding the voices of non-athletes continues to reinforce the misconception about Black male enrollment at PWIs.

In the end the sample consisted of Black male undergraduates that met the participation criteria outlined in the IRB application:

- undergraduate male with at least junior standing (minimum of 53 earned credit hours) or male alumnus that graduated by August 2012
- identify as Black or African-American

As indicated by the signed letter of informed consent each participant met these criteria to participate in this study. The majority of participants were not NCAA athletes. At the time of the data collection only three of the men had a self-reported GPA of 3.0 or better. For the most part the informants met the desired sample population of non-athletes and students not identified as academic high-achievers.

Sample Size

Ten participants voluntarily consented to participate in this research study. Creswell (2007) recommended having no more than 10 participants, while Polkinghorne (as cited in Creswell, 2007), stated as few as five participants is sufficient when there is

redundancy and a saturation of data. The researcher felt confident a suitable level of redundancy was achieved after the sixth participant's interview. Subsequent interviews provided additional saturation with limited new information.

Research Site Selection

This research site was selected for multiple reasons, including out of convenience. Convenience sampling is common in dissertation research and is acceptable when “related to the phenomenon of interest” and doctoral students have limited access to financial support for their research (Tierney & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115). While this PWI was selected out of convenience, this site is unquestionably relative to the phenomenon of interest. While finances were a consideration, the site selected is reflective of PWIs with growing minority student enrollment and low rates of degree completion for Black male undergraduates.

The research site selected for this study is a public, predominantly White, Bachelor's degree-granting four-year institution with a comprehensive division of student affairs. The selected research site is particularly relevant when you consider PWIs enroll nearly 90% of Black undergraduate students (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; NCES, 2011b). Even though generalizability of findings is not the primary goal for this study, this public Midwestern university is similar to many other public universities, in that it is a predominantly White institution and Black males are the least retained population.

Data Analysis

Although described in different sections data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously. Data analysis was an ongoing and iterative process that started soon after completing the first interview. For example, transcripts were reviewed prior to

conducting more interviews. This assisted in identifying potential areas to probe during future interviews.

The data analysis process for this research project included field notes during interviews, post-interview reflections & memos, margin notes on transcripts, and data reduction. Data reduction followed methods commonly linked to grounded theory data analysis, which Creswell (2007) noted is a process “similar to phenomenology” (p. 160). As a whole, the analytical process included several steps detailed in upcoming sections focused on trustworthiness of data and the process of data reduction.

Bracketing. The first step in analyzing the data followed in line with recommendations from Creswell (2007). That is prior to beginning data reduction Creswell suggested “epoche, or bracketing” as the initial step in phenomenological data analysis (p. 235). If a researcher has prior experience with a phenomenon to be studied, the researcher must critically examine those experiences prior to conducting research; and the prejudices and assumptions discovered must be bracketed (Merriam, 2009). Creswell stated bracketing is difficult and suggested that perhaps researchers need to “suspend” previous connections rather than bracket experiences (p. 62).

Suspending ideas and beliefs held prior to conducting research and analyzing emerging themes acknowledged the researcher’s role and previous experience with the phenomenon. As Stake (2010) pointed out, it is rare for the investigator to come into the study as a blank slate. The reality is, the researcher was not empty-headed and must recognize preconceived beliefs about the phenomenon of interest.

Researcher role. Multiple efforts were made to acknowledge the research’s role and suspend or bracket influence of prior experiences. At the same time, Merriam (2009)

pointed out, the topic of research is typically generated from researcher “personal interests” (p. 56). Therefore it is possible that the researcher brings bias to the investigation. Since the researcher is the main tool for data collection, analysis, and construction of themes, potential biases must be acknowledged and reduced.

The researcher must acknowledge previous experiences and then bracket or suspend these experiences (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). With this in mind, it is worth sharing the researcher identifies as a Black male, that attended a public Midwestern PWI as an undergraduate student. While it could be argued the researcher’s previous experiences stimulate bias, Okolie (2005) argued previous experiences and shared identities between the participants and the researcher are valuable. He added, investigators that “share an experience are better positioned to be accorded the authority to speak to those experiences” (p. 241). In addition to shared experiences of being a Black man at a public Midwestern PWI, the researcher has made several connections with Black men through his higher education career. As a practitioner with a career in student affairs and academic affairs at two public Midwestern PWIs the researcher had some low levels of prior relationship with a few participants in the study. Despite these relationships the topics discussed during these interviews were not significantly discussed with any informant prior to this study. In addition, utilizing member checks and auditor review assisted in minimizing potential ethical issues and increasing validity.

Member checks. Research participants were invited to verify the accuracy of their transcribed comments. Several participants responded confirming no changes to the interview transcript. Merriam (2009) referred to this type of verification as member-checking. Member-checks are a form of “internal validity” that helped to ensure the

investigator correctly understood the phenomenon as presented by the participants in this study (p. 217). As Merriam stated, while the interpretations belong to the researcher, the experiences belong to the participants and should be accurate according to the participants.

External auditing. Due to the nature of the researcher's personal and professional experiences and, in some cases, prior minor relationship with participants an external auditor reviewed the data analysis. A researcher with experience in qualitative data analysis assisted with reviewing findings from this study and made suggestions regarding coding and categorizing data. Auditor suggestions were consistent with researcher coding and analysis. Utilizing an auditor served as another form of reducing potential bias and increasing trustworthiness and credibility for this study.

Iterative reduction process. In sum, data analysis followed an iterative process described by Galleta (2013). That is, data analysis and data reduction included continuously returning back to the data. Analysis began within a few hours after the first interview, which included post-interview reflections, or researcher memos. Merriam (2009) advised researchers to reflect upon the interview and write notes soon after the interview, even when interviews are recorded. These memos assisted in subsequent interviews. Further analysis of the first interview continued as additional participants were interviewed. This iterative process of returning to each interview and notes continued from interview one through the final interview, and throughout the data reduction process.

The data reduction process followed a pattern consistent with grounded theory data analysis and applicable to phenomenology. As Creswell (2007) explained grounded

theory data reduction consists of open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding allowed for summarizing participants' statements into descriptive and in vivo codes that were not predetermined. Galleta (2013) emphasized the importance of open coding and encouraged "*not* to pursue the relationship between data and theory" (p. 122). The connection between code and theory happen later in the data analysis process. The open coding process was a review much like the process of horizontalization. Horizontalization, as Merriam (2009) described, consists of reviewing data collected with equal weight before it is organized into themes and given greater value.

For this study the open coding process typically occurred during second and sometimes third readings of transcripts. This process included assigning descriptive in vivo codes to each transcript. Descriptive codes use words or phrases to describe and summarize the content of a research participant's experience. In vivo coding uses the participant's own words as the descriptive words or phrases (Creswell, 2007). Through this process nearly 1200 open codes emerged. These were initially reduced to 422 unduplicated codes.

As an aside, although codes were counted, counts for the number of times a code appeared are not reported in the findings. Creswell (2007) acknowledged counting codes is debatably accepted in qualitative research. Creswell stated reporting counts and frequencies is counter to qualitative methodology. He shared simply counting codes "conveys that all codes should be given equal emphasis and it disregards that the passages coded may actually represent contradictory views" (p. 152). During the open coding process each code was given equal weight, no matter the frequency with which it appeared in the data.

As data reduction continued beyond open coding, the axial coding process was next. Axial coding consisted of linking similar open codes, or as Merriam (2009) described, axial coding is finding relation between open codes. As “relating” codes were linked multiple codes were classified by categories (p. 200). This process initially resulted in reducing the 422 unduplicated codes to 35 categories. For example, the category of “Welcoming” included seven open codes. Table 3.1 displays these seven codes utilized to develop this category.

Table 3.1

Illustration of Codes Forming a Category

Category: WELCOMING

Codes:	Approachability
	Southern Greeting
	Welcoming
	Welcoming Campus
	Welcoming Fraternity
	Welcoming Space
	Welcoming Staff

Creswell (2007) stated his preference for limiting the number of categories to a manageable number of no more than thirty. Bogden and Biklen (2003) suggest 30-50 code categories. The initial thirty-five categories that emerged during the axial coding process were well within range of these expert recommendations.

After continuing to reduce and refine categories the selective coding process began. Seidman (1998) described how this selective process might cause researcher

angst, as there is natural concern for omitting codes and statements that are actually significant. He shared this is basically something a researcher has to live with and that steps to reduce bias are important to assist with reducing the concern for omitting key elements of the essence of participants' experiences.

Making meaning. As selective codes emerged significant “passages that are interesting” were kept to assist in forming themes and making meaning (Seidman, 1998, p. 100). Chapter Five describes each theme. These themes are organized into descriptions that give structure to the “‘essence’ of the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). Creswell described essence is the combination of textural and structural description. Textural description is focused on “what participants experienced” while structural description is “how” participants experienced the phenomenon (p. 60). These descriptions “bring in the voice of participants in the study” and capture the essence of their experiences in their words (p. 182). The final chapter discusses themes from the study in comparison to Tinto’s theory on social integration.

Summary

This chapter identified the qualitative research methodology procedures employed in this research investigation. Among the many choices of qualitative approaches, the phenomenological method was selected as an appropriate process to collect and analyze data for this study. Face to face semi-structured interviews were utilized to capture the essence of Black male undergraduate persisters’ social integration experiences at a public Midwestern predominantly White campus. Multiple efforts to increase validity and trustworthiness were employed to add credibility to the data analysis process.

CHAPTER FOUR

Participants

Introduction

The sample selection for this investigation was purposive or purposeful. Despite historical and current trends indicating low retention and degree completion of Black male undergraduates there are many Black males that are retained and persist to earn a Bachelor's degree. The researcher purposely sought to learn about the experiences of no more than ten Black male undergraduate persisters at one Midwestern PWI.

Data were collected from 10 Black male undergraduates to provide basic understanding of their lived social integration experiences and retention at the university serving as the research site. Participation in this research study included voluntary completion of informed consent (Appendix A), a two-page demographic questionnaire (Appendix B), and at least one face to face semi-structured interview (see Appendix C for interview protocol). A second semi-structured interview was necessary for one participant. A profile of the ten participants follows, while the next chapter provides explanation of the themes that emerged from participant interviews.

The Men

Ten undergraduate Black men volunteered to participate in this research study. Each of the men met the study criteria. The men were undergraduates with at least junior standing (minimum of 53 earned credit hours) and identify as Black or African-American. At the time of this study, nine participants held undergraduate senior classification and one participant was a junior. The informants were on track to graduate in December 2014 or no later than the 2015 calendar year.

Upon completion of an initial interview each participant was assigned a pseudonym to keep their responses confidential. Table 4.1 includes the pseudonym for each participant and shows a broad demographic profile of responses to the demographic questionnaire.

TABLE 4.1

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Classification	Residency	Home Community	GPA ¹	Student-Athlete
Ronald	Junior	In State	Urban	2.2	No
Eddie	Senior	In State	Urban	3.0	No
Isiah	Senior	In State	Urban	3.2	No
Prentiss	Senior	Out of State	Urban	2.5	Yes ²
Phil	Senior	In State	Urban	3.2	No
William	Senior	In State	Urban	2.3	No
Ernie	Senior	In State	Urban	2.6	No
Terrance	Senior	In State	Urban	2.7	No
Eric	Senior	Out of State	Suburban	2.8	Yes
Telemanté	Senior	Out of State	Suburban	2.8	No

¹Grade Point Average (GPA) was self-reported by participants and rounded to the nearest tenth.

²Prentiss was temporarily on a team but discontinued his student athlete career after his first semester.

In addition to the demographic data provided thus far, it is important to note some academic major classifications are not reported in this study. Identifying specific majors may jeopardize the anonymity of some participants, as a few men self-reported small enrollment of Black men in their academic majors.

Forthcoming narrative quotations retelling their lived experiences exemplify participants were candid about their experiences. Their forthrightness paints a vivid picture illuminating themes emerging from their experiences. The next section provides

further participant profile information. Participants are presented in the order of initial interviews.

Ronald. The first interview participant for the study, Ronald, agreed to participate in this study the same evening that the request for participants email was sent. He was eager to share his experiences. Early in the interview Ronald described himself as a person of mixed race. However, he did not indicate more than one race on the demographic questionnaire. Ronald stated, "...even though I'm like half White and half Black, you know, I identify, I identify myself as Black and stuff, you know. That's 'cause I was raised like that, you know, to think like that."

Ronald's home community was predominantly Black. His mother had some college education, but at the time of the interview she had not completed a degree. Ronald's father did not finish high school. At the time of the interview Ronald held junior standing at the university and he did not communicate any concerns of being in jeopardy of not graduating.

Ronald seemed reluctant to say anything negative about the university, but eventually he shared some less than desirable experiences with discrimination on campus. Overall it was clear Ronald was very happy to be a student at the Midwestern PWI, so much so that he had a tattoo of the university's logo. He vividly remembered getting the tattoo in October of his freshman year.

Eddie. The home community for Eddie was also predominantly Black, however he had experience navigating predominantly White communities. In fact he shared that he spent some of his youth growing up in the same city as the research site. Even with this background, Eddie expressed feeling like an outsider and sometimes feeling invisible

on campus. However, he also described how those feelings have been reduced over time. Eddie shared, “As a senior I guess I am more... I’m more open to meeting people. I am... less afraid of the feeling of exclusion...” Feeling excluded combined with a poor first semester academically made Eddie question if the university was right for him, yet he persisted at the institution.

Eddie partially credited his parents for the reason he remained at the university. Both of Eddie’s parents had attended the university; however his father did not earn a degree and his mother earned a Bachelor’s degree. Eddie has two siblings currently enrolled at the university, including his brother Terrance. Terrance was also a participant in the study.

Isiah. The home community for Isiah was about sixty miles from the university campus. He described the community as predominantly Black. With such close proximity to campus, Isiah acknowledged many of his high school classmates also attended the university. Many of his Black male friends from high school were also members of his high school football team; however Isiah did not come to the university to participate in athletics.

Isiah mentioned his grandparents “primarily raised” him, but noted his mother was in the picture. In terms of parent/guardian education he indicated his mother held an Associate’s degree or certificate, but he was unsure of the highest completed education for his father.

Prentiss. Prentiss is an out of state senior scheduled to graduate in December 2014. During his time at the university Prentiss attempted to join the track and field team, but was unable to beat out scholarship recruits to remain on the team beyond his

first semester. Similarly he described trying join the marching band, which was competitive. Like track and field, he was “unsuccessful” in joining the band.

His home community was predominantly Black. Surprisingly, Prentiss identified his home community as “the most segregated city in the United States”. He felt the university and surrounding community was nothing like his home community. Prentiss was very satisfied with his university experience and never truly considered leaving the university prior to graduation.

In terms of family education, both his parents held at least a Bachelor’s degree, with his mom having earned a graduate/professional degree.

Phil. Phil is enrolled in his third postsecondary institution. In 2010 Phil earned an Associate’s degree at a community college in a neighboring state. He then attended an on-line institution for a year and a half. In 2012 he took the advice of a childhood friend, and transferred to the university serving as the research site for this study. His friend not only attended the current institution, but also attended the same community college.

Both of Phil’s parents have a Bachelor’s degree. Even with a history of degree attainment, for himself and his parents, Phil was unconfident about his own degree completion at the research site. At one point he lamented, “Sometimes I don’t know if I’ll make it”. He later shared that he will make it, and that he is looking forward to graduation day.

His outwardly expressed excitement for graduation day paled in comparison to the pride Phil expressed for being the son of “baby boomers”. Phil had a large grin on his face when he described his mother’s generation. This outward admiration for what he

stated was “frontline” activism may explain similar excitement in his voice as he discussed his involvement with a new student organization focused on campus activism.

Phil was thankful for this research investigation. Toward the end of the interview he expressed his gratitude by saying:

I never get a chance to talk like this. Just tell, talk about Black issues and Black problems. ‘cause a big problem, that everybody doesn’t wanna hear about it. That’s what post racial means. Post racial means, it’s 2014, we are postmodern, we are ascended Americans, and... I don’t wanna hear that shit no more! Pull yourself up by your bootstraps and make it all happen.

After completing the interview Phil continued to discuss being thankful for the opportunity to talk about being Black on a predominantly White campus.

William. Though he was in state and only an hour from his home community, William acknowledged a perceptible difference in his home community environment and the community encompassing and surrounding the university. William described coming from a predominantly Black home community, but accepted being one of the few people of color in his high school honors classes.

In terms of parent/guardian education he indicated his mother had a high school diploma, but he was unsure of the highest completed education for his father. William had many choices for higher education, but he decided to stay in-state and save money. He said he did not regret the decision to stay, but “wondered what other opportunities could exist and did exist if [he] were to go somewhere else”.

Early in the interview William described the fun he had freshman year of college, particularly in the residence hall. Now as a senior living off campus William classified himself as a busy person that does not have nearly the fun he had as a freshman. He outlined, “Oh a typical day for me on campus now is go, go, go, right. So it, it’s all

business. Essentially no fun...I go to work, I go to class, I go home.” Another factor in his busyness, William is a member of a historically Black fraternity.

Ernie. Ernie is a self-proclaimed entrepreneur and owns a business he started in high school. Like all the men in this study, Ernie’s home community was primarily Black. Ernie shared that his parents were divorced and his mom had earned a Bachelor’s, while his dad had completed a high school education.

Despite growing up in a Black community, Ernie described frequently visiting the neighboring predominantly White community where his grandfather lived. Ernie noted a perceptible difference in the socioeconomics of his grandfather’s community in comparison to that of his parents’ neighborhood.

During his time at the university Ernie joined a historically Black fraternity. Ernie and William are members of the same fraternity. Ernie was encouraged to participate in the study by William.

Terrance. At the time of the interview Terrance had both a younger brother (Eddie) and younger sister attending the university. Terrance arrived at the university prior to Eddie and will graduate after Eddie, but before his sister. He described his first year on campus without his brother as scary. Recalling that fear and realizing his brother will graduate before him makes Terrance scared of what campus will be like once his brother graduates. He added, it is not just about his brother graduating, but also many of his peers that he began college with will have also graduated.

Putting it all together, Terrance reflected, “I feel like I’ll be like the oldest person here. I won’t be... But, you know; feel like it’s just the list is getting smaller who came here when I came here. Who I was really close with”. Terrance also recalled his dad

accurately predicting how his “confidence level was gonna change” when his brother arrived to campus. In the end Terrance said he was confident that he would be fine after his brother and remaining friends graduated, noting it was “just gonna be awkward” to be without his brother.

Again, his father attended the university, but did not earn a degree and his mother earned a Bachelor’s degree from the university. In fact, his mother had earned a graduate/professional degree. His brother Eddie graduated in December 2014. During the interview he shared that William was his best friend in high school and was one of his first friends in college. William also graduated in December 2014.

Eric. Eric is a scholarship college student-athlete. He was recruited from out of state to attend the university and participate in intercollegiate athletics. During his time at the university Eric joined a historically Black fraternity. Eric’s fraternity and sport will not be identified because of the small number of Black Greek student athletes at the institution.

Eric described his home community as primarily Black; sharing, “I went to a private Christian school, all Black kids. (Laughs) All my teachers were Black”. He attended private Christian schools before going to a public high school. His high school was also predominantly Black.

In terms of parental education, Eric’s parents both had some level of postsecondary degree attainment. At the time of the interview his father had some graduate level education, but had not yet earned a graduate or professional degree. His mother had earned an Associate’s degree. Eric has an older brother in college, but his brother is not enrolled at the same institution.

Telemanté. Telemanté is a first-generation American who grew up in the Southern region of the United States. When his parents immigrated to the U.S. he had access to American Black communities, but he declared he has “never been part of a large Black community”. Telemanté shared that his high school was primarily Black, but he was in a magnet program with mostly White classmates. Throughout two interviews Telemanté described the irony in his ineffectiveness to navigate his predominantly White campus environment. This is ironic when you consider his best friends in high school were White, both his parents have multiple college degrees, and both parents have worked in higher education at PWIs.

Telemanté represented many of the attributes Strayhorn and DeVita (2010) identified as typical for Black males at PWIs. He purposely stayed disconnected from faculty, and for several years he was intentional in not attempting to make connections with his peers of any race. Telemanté admitted he does not have a social life because of his focus on academics. His seemingly only social outlet is playing the drums in a local band. While his parents enjoy seeing him play in the band, they much rather he focus on academics. Telemanté had a lot to say about his experiences, and he was the only participant to require two face to face interviews.

Although he dislikes being at the university he is intentionally lingering around so he does not have to face the reality of life after earning his undergraduate degree. He is scheduled to graduate in May 2015 and he wants to go to graduate school directly after graduation. However, he shared, “I don’t think I’m ready academically to get into a good school. And I don’t think... I would get into a good school, I think I need more time to build up my [GPA and profile]”. He disclosed that he intentionally missed the deadline

for graduate exams and that he does not want to have the feeling of “rejection” from good graduate programs.

Summary

This chapter provided insight into the demographic and personal profiles of ten Black undergraduate male persisters at a Midwestern PWI. Black male persisters were purposefully selected for this study on social integration and retention. Each of the men met the criteria to participate in this study and voluntarily shared their social integration experiences at one Midwestern PWI. Participation in this research study included voluntary completion of an informed consent letter, a demographic questionnaire, and at least one face to face semi-structured interview. To protect their identity each participant in the study was assigned a pseudonym.

CHAPTER FIVE

Findings

Introduction

This chapter provides findings from this phenomenological investigation of the experiences of undergraduate persisters. Tinto's (1987, 1993, 2012) assertion that students voluntarily leave institutions for social integration, or nonacademic, reasons informed this study. The purpose of this study was to better understand how social integration was perceived to have contributed to retention at the research site. The central question guiding this research study was: What meaning do Black male undergraduate persisters give to social integration and their retention at a PWI? Data collected from 10 Black male undergraduates provide basic understanding of lived social integration experiences related to retention at the research site.

This chapter provides rich, thick, detailed description of lived experiences of participants related to the following research sub-questions:

1. How do participants describe their social integration experience at the institution?
2. What social integration or nonacademic themes do participants attribute to their retention at a public Midwestern PWI?
3. How important or insignificant is social integration when described in relation to Black male undergraduate retention?
4. What social integration initiatives do participants believe student affairs should employ, revise, or remove to increase Black male undergraduate retention?

The lived experiences of the participants addresses these research questions. Findings from data collection and analysis are subsequently reported by themes. Each of the

themes emerged from interviewing the men in this study and were not preconceived prior to data collection.

Findings from this study provide implications for higher education and student affairs to improve student retention and the experience of persisters. Findings indicate social integration was described as more important for comfort than it was to retention. The following emergent themes and participant quotes demonstrate support for this assertion.

Emergent Themes

After meticulous analysis and reduction of data from each interview transcript and audio file, investigator memos, margin notes, and member checks several themes emerged. These themes describe and interpret how the participants make sense of their social integration and retention on a Midwestern predominantly White campus. This section of the chapter reports findings of the study organized by each research sub-question and emergent themes.

Researcher interpretation identified a total of eight themes and three sub-themes that emerged from constant and continuous data analysis. These themes and a multitude of supporting participant quotes are provided to address each research sub-question. These quotes are representative of a composite narrative of participant experiences rather than providing responses to each question from each participant. A combination of short quotes, embedded quotes, as well as long quotes are interwoven throughout each discussion of themes. As Creswell (2007) noted, this “variation” of quotes “bring in the voice of participants” (p. 182).

In terms of the themes the overwhelming majority of themes are responsive to only one research sub-question. However one sub-theme does address multiple research

sub-questions. When possible in vivo codes were utilized to describe themes for this study. Table 4.2 provides a display of the themes associated with each sub-question.

TABLE 4.2

Research Sub-Questions with Themes and Sub-Themes

Research Sub-Question #1: How do participants describe their social integration experience at the institution?

Theme 1: Mixed Bag of Things

Sub-Theme 1a: Multicultural Center in the Mix

Theme 2: Always Representing

Theme 3: Adapting Here

Theme 4: Clique Matters

Research Sub-Question #2: What social integration or nonacademic themes do participants attribute to their retention at a public Midwestern PWI?

Theme 5: Impactful Engagements

Sub-Theme 1a: Multicultural Center in the Mix

Research Sub-Question #3: How important or insignificant is social integration when described in relation to Black male undergraduate retention?

Theme 6: Money Matters

Theme 7: Not Leaving

Sub-Theme 7a: Family and Community Values

Research Sub-Question #4: What social integration initiatives do participants believe student affairs should employ, revise, or remove to increase Black male undergraduate retention?

Theme 8: Institutional Control

Sub-Theme 8a: An Academic Affair

These themes offer an abstract explanation of the lived experiences of the participants in relation to the data analysis and response to research questions.

Research sub-question #1: How do participants describe their social integration experience at the institution? This first research sub-question provides a glimpse into the participants' lived experiences outside the classroom at the Midwestern PWI. Overall the men described how social integration experiences ranged from feelings of "inclusion" to feelings of "exclusion". Few of the men described feeling fully socially integrated within the campus community. The majority of the men felt there were only a few places on campus where they experienced social integration and comfort. The following themes and participant quotes provide support for interpretation of these findings.

Mixed bag of things. This theme describes the variety of responses to the first question about campus experiences for the participants. After informing each participant that this study focused on their out of class experiences, each of the first ten semi-structured interviews began with the same open-ended question: *What has life been like for you as a Black man at this university?* Responses included a mix of similarities and variances in social integration experiences. The theme emerging from these responses was "Mixed Bag of Things", an in vivo code from the interview with Isiah.

Participants' responses were truly mixed. In many cases the men described how they felt excluded from several university spaces, while in other instances the men detailed feeling integrated. The theme "Mixed Bag of Things" emerged from the following four categories: 1) Feelings, 2) Welcoming, 3) Fitting In, and 4) Engagement.

These categories summarize codes that describe social integration for the men in this study.

The men's feelings about campus being welcoming, their fitting in, and their engagement were clearly a mixed bag of things, both as individuals and as a collective. In some circumstances there were mixed experiences of positive and negative social integration for the same individual.

Isiah's response to the first interview question exemplifies the variety of experiences he has had on campus. Isiah stated:

It's been good for me. Its kinda been a mixed bag a things. Kinda walk on this campus, tryin' to find exactly where you fit in. After a while, or, in the beginning you really don't know...So it's, it's been enlightening, it's been, it's been, eye opening, it's been different, but it's also been, you know, it's been a wonderful experience, to say the least.

Despite opening the interview describing his experience as "wonderful", Isiah later revealed there were few places on campus he felt "normal". When asked, "If you were in charge of this university, what would you recommend for increasing Black males' degree completion here?" Isiah responded:

Inclusion... And I don't feel like I, I've seen that within this campus...like you want to nee—you—I wanna feel wanted here. Like I want to feel like I'm, I'm wanted, I'm known about and that I'm wanted and that I'm cared for.

These responses give a glimpse into how Isiah felt he fit into the university. For Isiah, his experience on campus has been a mixed bag of things and he is not alone in these feelings and experiences.

Responses from two interviews with Telemanté epitomized the theme "Mixed Bag of Things". Telemanté described being "not socially fulfilled" and stated, "There's not a place on campus I feel comfortable". On the other hand he outlined how playing

the drums along with fun times with his best friend, meeting Black people in the campus multicultural center, and comfort in his academic college as experiences that made him comfortable or made the university bearable. Many of Telemanté's experiences will be described throughout upcoming themes.

Like Telemanté, other men had mixed experiences of welcomeness and fit on campus. Answering the same initial question about what life is like as a Black man on this campus, Eddie shared:

Life for me, that's a tough question. (Laughs) At the university as a Black man. Hmm... It hasn't necessarily been tough, but it hasn't been easy. I guess as a Black man on this, at this university, it's different. It's not necessarily... the... I don't wanna say proto typical college life, but it's, it's one of struggle. It's one of... some exclusion; some inclusion, but more exclusion than inclusion. Tough. I'd say tough, been a little tough.

This short excerpt of Eddie's response illustrates a "Mixed Bag of Things". Within this brief response Eddie exhibits a mix of what his experiences have been. In the beginning he downplayed the amount of exclusion he had experienced and within seconds he revealed a contradictory experience. When asked what he felt excluded from, Eddie responded:

Campus. (Laughs) To... to kinda generalize it, a lot a places on campus are...excluding, and I don't think necessarily, it's purposeful, like that's the main intent, but that's just how it is. I feel excluded from campus, I feel excluded from... certain groups; certain groups of people groups of organizations, stuff like that.

It seems Telemanté would concur with Eddie's experience as Telemanté questioned what his social integration experience would be like if he was not a Black man. When asked about life at the university Telemanté explained, "So I wouldn't say it's been exceptional. I would take it as, if I was a White person, would it be really great? Yeah, I think it'd be,

I think it would be a lot better”. Terrance recounted exclusion in the campus recreation center supporting the notion of what it might be like if he was not a Black man attending a PWI:

... Just playin’ basketball at the rec sometimes, people don’t wanna play with like me and my brother. If there’s like, there’s one time there was 9 people playin’ a full court game, and they didn’t wanna, they said, they said they would sub out rather play without us, so, okay.

During his interview (without any prompting) Eddie added more to the story his brother shared regarding experiences at campus recreation:

I’m always in the rec. But... the... certain basketball courts I guess (Laugh) it’s just like there’s a... no court is specifically for a certain person, that’s not necessarily what I’m saying. But if there’s a group a people playin’ on one court, and you wanna run a 5 on 5, and they’re all White people, it’s... you’ll, you kinda have the feeling like, okay, I’m not gonna play 5 on 5 today, because it’s, it’s either I’m looked at as oh you’re Black, you must be great, or, or you’re black, we don’t wanna play with you. And it’s never... let’s run game. It’s never just that.

This recollection by Terrance and Eddie illustrated how the men felt like there were places on campus where they felt unwelcomed and questioned fitting in. Conversely, Prentiss felt comfortable throughout campus. He shared, “I didn’t feel out of place” during any portion of his interview.

Across each interview there were plenty of examples of how the experiences of these men reflected the theme “Mixed Bag of Things”. Within this theme, a sub-theme also emerged. As the men talked about their social integration experiences it became apparent the campus multicultural center was in the mix.

Multicultural center in the mix. As these men shared their lived experiences of being Black at a Midwestern predominantly White institution it was apparent the campus multicultural center provided an avenue for how social integration occurred. The

multicultural center was overwhelmingly one common place they identified feeling socially integrated. Only William was hesitant in describing the multicultural center as a meaningful place for his comfort and social integration.

The multicultural center was clearly in the mix of how participants described their social integration experience at the institution. Several participants discussed how they met and made friends in the center. The majority of the men labeled the campus multicultural center as a place of “normalcy” and “belonging”. With this in mind the sub-theme “Multicultural Center in the Mix” emerged as a representation of how social integration was depicted.

The multicultural center is one of the few places on campus where Isiah felt “normal”. He was not alone in those feelings. Nine out of the ten men felt the multicultural center was meaningful in increasing their social integration at the university. Although Prentiss did not feel uncomfortable anywhere on campus, he did explicitly state the multicultural center was important for “comfort”.

The majority of the men in this study consistently echoed how the multicultural center was a place of “comfort” and a place like “home”. When asked what the center meant for him Eddie stated:

That’s my cam—that’s my on campus home. If I’m on campus, I’m goin’ to class, I’m goin’ to the multi. It’s where I... it’s where I feel that I belong, or they, they make me feel like I belong there.

When asked “What is it you feel people do to make you feel like you belong?” Eddie laughingly responded, “Nothing. (Laugh) They don’t do... anything I guess. They just treat you as a person... They just... they just talk to you like you’re a normal person”.

Eddie's comments insinuate that elsewhere on campus he is treated as if he were abnormal or alien.

Continuing praise Phil described his first time coming to an event at the multicultural center as "beautiful". He shared the shock he had when he walked in and saw other Black students, saying, "I was like it's so... it's a welcoming feeling, it's like you know, where the fuck you all been hidin' at? Like, I didn't know ya'll would be here. And I started comin' back more..." Like Phil, Telemanté also described the campus multicultural center as a meaningful place where he eventually met other Black students, and Black men in particular.

Throughout both his interviews Telemanté clearly articulated the displeasure of being surrounded by White people inside and outside of class. Yet he also acknowledged making little effort to socialize with his peers, White, Black, or otherwise. At the same time, he did describe that after arriving at the predominantly White university and later meeting Black male friends it did make the university more bearable. He shared, "...I'm finally finding these Black dudes I can just chill with; that's cool. I'm not sayin' that changed everything, but I'm sayin' that's definitely a highlight. That's a, that was a good thing". Many of these friends were men he met at the multicultural center.

While these narratives describe how Black people use the center, several of the men also acknowledged the multicultural center was not solely for Blacks. Eric poignantly and without prompting recognized that some people might see the social integration that occurs in the multicultural as separatist and shared:

Even though I know a lot a people are like oh why you all gotta separate yourselves? It's not about separation, it's just it's one thi—sometimes you just like to be with the people you're most familiar with. And I think there's nothin' wrong with that. Like... it's, like they do that, they do that in a lot a thing. You

know like, Art students stay together. Uh... learning communities, that, they have that on this campus a lot, they have a lot a learning communities. And it's like oh they gonna be separated. It's not about bein' separated. Sometimes just wanna be about like-minded people, who are... go, who went through the same thing that you. You know. Just, I think that's just what it is. But, if there's no, if there's no like multicultural center I feel like some... feel like, I feel like some people are... not understanding their race, or their ethnicity, or what it means to them, then they loosen that. I think that's what the [multicultural center] like really does. Like for me, that's it did to me. Just helped me to recognize that who I'm, like, what my race means to me, and like it is important.

Like Eric, several of the men also acknowledged the center was not just for Blacks or minorities in general. The men voluntarily emphasized that the multicultural center was a “welcoming space” for the greater campus. This openness seemed to bother William.

Unlike the other men in this study, William was cautious in anointing the multicultural center as a place of solace for Black men. However, he claimed this was due to his experiences in the old center. When asked, “What does the multicultural center mean to you?” William responded:

I was... for anyone who was ever aware, I was not the biggest of fans of the... creation and implementation of the multicultural center. Mainly from this standpoint: I felt... as if the entire building and what the building was supposed to represent, I felt it, it made African American students and Black students, or anyone else who used the previous building which was... identified and called only the culture center, I felt it made them... as the minority. And I don't mean minority in terms of, you know, their racial classification as much minority as in numbers. I felt that the minority for some reason had to... appease the majority. And I had a, a very, very big problem with what was wrong with the building that we had.

It became evident that William was upset that the previous center was no longer in existence. William explicitly stated:

So you went from a... in my opinion, a, a smaller... more intimate thing to a, a larger... building which... although it seemed like it was a good thing, removed a level of intimacy that, again I say, I think it is very important to communal people

and communal cultures. And I think you only make those... that, that... that only becomes increasingly more problematic when you surround that, that student area, with professionals who say, "Hey, you guys are being too loud", or I want to close my door because you're not allowing me to work, or things of that nature, which is understandable, because you're in an office, but the problem is, this is a student space.

For William the new building was not a positive. Conversely, Prentiss expressed how much he liked the new building and its' cleanliness.

It seems attachments with the former facility may have contributed to William holding the lone stance of not crediting the multicultural center with being part of his social integration. However, despite his attachment with the former building William was able to acknowledge hope that the current center supported social integration and retention for others.

When asked what he believed the multicultural center meant for other Black men William responded:

I'm not sure what it means anymore. When I came in, I knew that that was the place where... you went. Whether it was for... you know, purely simple conversation or, if you really need to find out about a culture or ethnic based event, or something or another, or, if that was purely a place where you were gonna find more people who looked like you, that was what that building was my first semester. I don't know if that's, what that building is anymore. Primarily because, I'm around less and less, right. So I think that that's an important caveat. So I, I'm not aware of the, the, the foot traffic you know, that, that the building you know receives as much. I am very much aware that a lot of the foot traffic are for people who are simply coming in for a meeting and going, not people who are, you know, coming to hang out of sorts. So I'm not sure what it means for, you know, the Black student body, and more specifically Black men anymore. My hope is it, it's a place where they feel like... that's where I should go. But I, if I were to be a betting man, I would... I would say most people never really spend much time there.

Regardless of how much time spent in the building, it was clear the multicultural center had positive meaning for William, as well as the nine other men in this study. Although he was hesitant to attribute his social integration as an outcome of experiences in the center, he did acknowledge the multicultural center has potential to provide an avenue for social integration and increasing retention for other Black males.

Always representing. The theme “Always Representing” surfaced as a depiction of how the men described their identity and image as part of social integration. The concepts of representing Blackness and athletics were repeatedly discussed in multiple interviews. These representations are part of how these men describe their social integration.

Several of the men described their identity and image in terms of representing Blackness and Black culture. Often this discussion was in relation to how the predominantly White campus community viewed their representation. Thus, the men always represented Blackness, even while code switching. Each of the men in the study were proud of their Blackness and what it meant to be Black.

While there were many similarities, there were also discrepancies in how the men described representing Blackness. For example, Telemanté and Eric represented Blackness in a way that seemed different than the other men in this study. Both Telemanté and Eric stated they knew they were Black, but seemed to discover something new about their Blackness during college.

For Telemanté he represented Blackness from the perspective of a first generation Black American. Speaking about his early childhood, he stated:

I wasn't involved with Black culture, we didn't go to a Black Baptist church until... until late middle school, early high school. No. Yeah, late, late middle

school, right. So I didn't have a Black community, right. So I didn't know... Black music, didn't know hip hop, didn't any a that. And that was... one a the things that I felt Black people usually talked about. So I didn't know any a the culture. Didn't wear Tims (Timberland boots), did none a that... It's not like I didn't have black friends. Actually, no, I didn't really have many black friends. They, they play over here, everyone else played somewhere else. That's what it felt like to me. It may not have been that, but I didn't feel like I was one of them. So not feeling that, literally not being like them, like not goin' to where they go to church, not gonna going where they get their hair cut, not... eatin' the food they eat, not listening to the music they listen to, I was not a part of them. On top of that, being told I wasn't being part of them by the White friends who liked me because I wasn't like that, right. So this is like from grade school up, so this is like the pathology I'm in.

This excerpt of Telemanté's childhood experiences of representing Blackness help provide context for how he feels about representing Blackness in college. Telemanté continued reflecting on negotiating his identity as a Black man from high school to now:

So... I have lots of White friends [in high school], I love White people, most of my friends are White, exception of all the band friends which is everybody out of the band. But, I have lots of White friends, I relate well to White people. But I'm goin' to college, and I got a, I mean I've been evaluating my Blackness, ev—like every year I gotta, you know, check in. (Laughs) It's like every Black, I mean, every Black must have to negotiate their Blackness at some point. And I'm, and then I'm like okay, I'm goin to college... it's not like I decide to become militant, but like I feel, I have become into myself as a Black man of some degree.

In many ways Telemanté's experiences were very similar to Eric. Both went to a predominantly Black high school, but had few Black friends. Both had pre-college experiences where they were viewed as not being Black enough. Yet the college environment became the place Eric and Telemanté were able to grow their representation of Blackness. Demonstrating growth in his representation of Blackness Telemanté remarked:

And right when I found myself in a conversation with Black people about somethin' Black, and these are Black American kids too, and I realize oh wait, I

am a Black American. I am Black American. I, we, no matter what my background is, I'm a first generation Black American, I need to start bein' a part of it. It's not like I didn't realize that, I always knew I had to. But when I realized oh I can be, I already am, I have been, felt pretty, felt, felt pretty nice. People like, people knowin' my name, remember my name.

While Telemanté found enjoyment in expressing his Blackness, Eric described initially being confused and burdened about representing Blackness. Eric expressed:

I don't think I ev—I, I feel like I never hated bein' Black 'cause a that, 'cause of goin' through that, sayin' like black is beautiful one of a kind., I just sometimes hated black people. (Laughs) But, I think I always did care about my... I always care about it, but I didn't understand, I don't think I really like deeply completely understand it. I probably like... was like a 60% understood it. And... people see I really understood it, what it means to be African American, I feel like it's just gone, then, some people may not understand fully what their race is. You know like, they won't have that, be able to have that... but actually think about it. Like I think a—like they, alright, I don't, I, I don't see it as a burden now. Like I feel like back in the day I see it as a burden thinkin' about my race all the time. But I don't see it as a burden anymore. At first I thought it was a burden. But as now I don't see it as a burden. It is a burden, but I don't see that, as the point. I feel like it's a, a form of strength you know.

This quote from Eric shows his growth from confusion and frustration to a position of pride in representing Blackness.

Like Eric and Telemanté other men in the study felt representing Blackness was part of their social integration. The campus community accepted or excluded them because of how they represented Blackness. Some of the men discussed how their Blackness permitted them to have a certain “swagger” or “swag” that non-Black peers did not own. Speaking about Black swag Phil stated:

I think...Black people have a cool about 'em. They got a swag about 'em that says... I don't really care what you think, I'm gonna, I'm gonna make it happen. And that's somethin', White people like they want. They want that. And I feel like a lot a times nowadays... we're such a counter culture, that... the fact that they don't understand it, leads them to just accept a whole bunch a shit. You

know like when they watch BET and they just think that's how we behave. And they see me in a looney, that, Looney Tune shirt. Like, oh, I just don't understand his swag. He's got somethin' goin'. I, I could never do that.

Prentiss agreed that Black men had an image that was well-regarded by others. He chuckled, Black men have “that swagger to ‘em”. Prentiss continued on by saying, “I mean, culturally Black people do things differently than White people”. These comments were a prelude to learning more about his lived experiences as a Black man at a Midwestern PWI.

As the only Black man in a traditionally White fraternity he added to the discussion about representing Blackness in a way no other participant in this study could. Prentiss discussed how he represented Blackness within his fraternity. Prentiss stated:

...I joined a fraternity, and it was a traditional fraternity, so... that, that was, obviously is different than joinin' a multicultural fraternity. But I, I mean they loved me in the fraternity. I don't wanna say that I was the token Black guy, but I was sorta kinda the token Black guy, yeah. (Laughs) I mean it was, I was the only guy that was Black, so I mean, but at the same time, we had a, a lot of, we had other... minorities in the fraternity as well.

Prentiss did not seem to mind being the only Black male in his fraternity and he felt his Blackness made him “stand out for the better”.

Each of these interview excerpts provide a glimpse of the lived experiences related to “Representing Blackness” for several of these men. In many cases there was pride in representing their Blackness. At other times, representing Blackness was not always at the forefront.

In addition to representing Blackness and Black culture there was a sense of seemingly always representing athletics. This sense of representing athletics was true for

both the student-athletes and many of the non-athletes in this study. Several of the participants had been assumed to have been athletes.

Whether they were actually athletes or not, they were always representing athletics. Eddie talked about how he was confused with being an athlete and how that made him feel. He explained:

At first it was almost flattering, 'cause, because it's like, oh man, I look like an athlete. I'm a freshman I could, yeah, I could be on the football team. They mistakin' me for one a them. But it... it quickly got annoying... When you get the question are you an athlete and you say no, I'm not an athlete, I played in high school or whatever, and it's oh then why you, oh, why, why are you here? When it's the assumption that, oh, you're not an athlete then what else could you possibly be here for. It's not even like they're asking what's your major, they're asking why are, why else are you here? For school, just like you're here. And it quickly, and you quickly realize that that is... is some of the underlying reason that they're not necessarily telling you. And that quickly shifts to... I guess at first it's anger, it's like why can't I be here for a different reason, why can't I just be here for school? But... it a—quick—fir—first it's anger, then it just becomes annoying. And... I don't wanna say a part of daily life, but sometimes it is. It becomes that.

Isiah also had familiarity with being mistaken for being an athlete. His multiple experiences led him to label Black male student-athletes' representation of Black men a sort of double-edged sword. He indicated:

It's... they help us and they hurt us at the same time I feel like, at least the Black men that I've seen. I mean they, they, I know they, they work hard for what they have, I know they, you know, they, they do all of that, but it's, that's pretty much all they see us as, as an athlete. I can't tell you how many times I have, once I introduce myself, or I've seen somebody, whether it be at a store, or whether it be at church even, do you play for the university, do you do—even girls, like do you do—? No, I don't play for the university! I'm 5 foot nothin'! Like, (both laugh a little) what would I play? But, I mean they, like I say, I just, I feel like that's what they see us as. They see, they see us as either football players, and that's pretty much it. (Laugh) That, that's pretty much all they see us as, football players, maybe a basketball player, and that's it.

These are just a few example narratives of the lived experiences of representing athletics from non-athletes. While these men were not actually student-athletes they felt a sense of representing athletics. Several of the men were confident they were seen as representing athletics because of their race and gender.

For the two men that actually were student athletes, they too described how they represented athletics. For both Eric and Prentiss, their athletic representation was more visible than their Blackness. Eric shared:

Bein' a athlete is kinda, is, it kinda destroyed bein' a—it's kinda weird (Laugh), kinda actually destroyed bein' African American on this campus in a sense, because you're not concerned with that; you're concerned about your, your sport and the people you're around with the most. And the people you're around with the most are other athletes. So, you're more tryin' to, it's more about... there, what sport you in, that... affects you as a student on the campus.

For Eric his identity as an athlete was more salient than his ethnic identity. When asked the initial question about life as a Black man at the university he stated:

I never...just starting at the university, I never really thought about it kinda, in a sense, or it really never affected me in a—because I was in, 'cause I'm a student athlete, and we are athletes, so... so you, so pretty much it's like a whole nother world kinda.

Prentiss, although only an athlete for a few months, agreed being an athlete was like being in a different world. Like Eric, Prentiss described the admiration people had for student-athletes. He reflected on his brief experience as a student-athlete and shared:

Well... to me like this, again this really doesn't have to do with race, but like to me, athletes get treated like royalty on this campus...But I mean like... when I was an athlete, and... I, I got treated really well, like really well. People just adored me almost.

Both Prentiss and Eric admitted to the admiration people have had for them because of their association with athletics. Several non-student athletes also acknowledged that

people on and off campus admired athletes and continuously viewed Black male students as athletes. In some cases, there was a sense of almost always representing athletics whether the men were student-athletes or not. No matter their status several participants continually described how they had to adapt to be successful.

Adapting here. Even with the solace of the multicultural center, the theme “Adapting Here” emerged as a label descriptive of participants’ social integration experiences. The men described part of their social integration required adapting to the university community. In some cases the culture shock of coming from Black home communities to a PWI required adapting. In other cases, they described how adapting by way of code switching.

Although each of the men in the study described coming from a mostly Black home community prior to arriving at the predominantly White campus many of them had experienced environments demographically representative of the campus population. These prior experiences seemed to help with adapting and social integration. Even with these prior experiences many of the men discussed the culture shock they experienced and how they had to adapt.

Narratives about culture shock exhibit the discomforting experiences many of the men reported having. Many times the men described the discomfort of being one of few as they navigated the university environment. However, William was repeatedly adamant that “comfort is a relatively overrated thing”. He remarked:

You’re at a university, you’re at a D1 research institution with thousands and thousands of students. [The university] isn’t supposed to be able to accommodate you as an individual, right. And... part of your progress has to come through discomfort. No one ever progresses when they’re fully comfortable, it just wouldn’t make any sense. So from that standpoint it’s, it’s... overrated.

These feelings reveal William's plea for Black men to take advantage of the university experience and adapt for life after the university. He went on to acknowledge the feeling of oneness can be challenging, but also added adapting to the predominantly White college environment will eventually be beneficial for Black men and people of color:

So, I said earlier, how comfort is, can be overrated. But a social obstacle that, that arises as a person of color, comes in being able to navigate this environment when there may not be a person who looks like you. Even though that, that will not... even though for the, for the great majority of us it won't, we won't find ourselves in, in workplace environments that are you know strictly you know people of color or anything like that, it still... it's still something to some degree intimidating to varying levels depending on who you are, to... be one and to be amongst easily hundreds [of White people] at a time, when you're walking to class. And, you could easily not see another person of color in your entire trek from dormitory to academic building, right. So, that is a social obstacle that people encounter.

Terrance echoed sentiments made by William. For instance, Terrance said, "I understand that comfort zone [is an issue], but, the world is not a comfortable place neither. There is a lot of practice here [for being uncomfortable]". Both men felt the PWI taught them how to adapt to the predominantly White workforce they anticipated entering after graduation.

Ernie attributed his ability to adapt at the university to the experiences he had visiting his grandfather, who lived in a predominantly White neighborhood. He stated:

So my grandfather lived [in an area], which is, you know, out where predominantly you know, Caucasian, White, White people live. And, you know, he was one of the first Black people to move out there in that area. And so I'd go out and spend a night there, and, you know, he adopted his wife's grand, his wife's grandchild, so, you know, he lived there. So when I'd go out there to play, he's made friends with individuals, so I'd go out and, you know now I've made friends with those individuals as well. So, from you know 7 years old and growing up and bein' out there, you know, I guess it's made me... I guess... it's cultured me to be, to be aware of my surroundings and it's cultured me to be able

to... I guess, well I don't wanna say—I guess you can say code switch, but it's, it's cultured me to be able to... adapt to... any environment that I'm in. So... being in this environment, it doesn't really hinder me, being that I had that exposure, being that I've been in those type of conditions.

While some of the men described the culture shock of coming from predominantly Black or minority high schools and home communities others, like Ernie, felt prior experiences allowed living in both worlds. This ability to live in both worlds was deemed good preparation for life after the university and was linked to discussions regarding code switching.

The concept of code switching emerged as part of “Adapting Here” as the participants reflected upon how they navigated the PWI. Several of the men discussed attempting to shelter their Blackness even though they were continuously representing Blackness. Although the phrase code switching is used here, few of the men seem to like the label of code switching. Others were fine with the terminology and accepted code switching as something that is essential or something that was an individual choice.

During the interviews terms related to code switching included “facade”, “selling out”, “buying in”, and muting. Using these terms the men provided several examples of how their social integration hinged on hiding their Blackness. In some cases they believed hiding their Blackness was not necessary now, but it would be for their future success.

For some, like Isiah, there was trepidation for how his Blackness would be received on campus. So instead of always representing Blackness he put up a “façade” to keep his Blackness to himself. Isiah disclosed where he felt like a facade was necessary:

Usually in the classes. You kinda have to temper the everything you say exactly when you're in class, because you don't wanna be representing, you know, first of

all you don't wanna look stupid. You don't want them them (White people) to think you're stupid because of your race, you don't want, you know, just pretty much just be a representation of your race. Pretty much everywhere I go, I, even when I'm listen' to music, you know, walkin', you know, just walkin' [on campus], I try to turn it down just so people can't hear it. Because if they hear rap music, then they automatically assume that hey, you're black, you're rap music. I mean it just kinda goes hand to hand. So I would say almost every, everywhere, again besides the [multicultural] center, I would have to do that. And, like I say, I'm primarily in [my academic building], so definitely in [my academic building] I do that quite often.

Many of the men described how they put up a façade or felt the need to code switch in a similar way as Isiah noted.

Most of the men described how they code switched or felt code switching was important for navigating PWIs and the world in general. Many of them described the inability to be one's true self in predominantly White environments. For instance, William expressed:

As part of a larger group, I'm not so sure that comfort exists. Not because you know there's, there's danger around, or—anything like that, as much as there's just not that place where I feel I can be at 100% of the time me, and represent all that you know my history and culture allows me to be.

The idea of not being “100 percent” of one's self was salient for many of the participants. Eric even referenced feeling like he had to “mute” his Blackness.

Eric initially stated he had not “muted his Blackness”, because since his junior year he surrounds himself with Black people. However, as the interview continued he shared when he is around White teammates he does code switch. Eric also acknowledged that after graduation, when he “gets a real job”, he will have to tone down his Blackness.

Ernie felt he “initially had to code switch” when meeting people for the first time. Then, like most of the men that at first said they code switched, Ernie retreated from

saying he code switches. On the contrary Telemanté described code switching as “something you gotta do! In the same way a Spanish speaking person gotta speak English in a different place, I gotta do things differently in the White space”. Terrance expressed, “I’m not sayin’ it’s okay, but... I understand like you all, everybody has to pay their bills, you know. You want to graduate. Handle your stuff. Just remember, you know, you are who you are. Where you came from”.

William continued to add to the discussion of code-switching and double-consciousness by describing a concept he referred to as “buying in”. He described:

...While people at home may feel like you’ve given up on where you come from, and say you sold out, and I’m not selling out, I’m buying into my future. I’m buying into who it is that I want to be. And if you believe in, you know a higher power, I personally believe in God, I’m buying into the destiny that God has, you know outlined for me. And I cannot do that... if... I don’t give, give everything that I have. So, selling out is for people who are unaware of... the true goal. Buying in is for people who... aspire for more. Now... if buying in means you completely relinquish anything from the past, that’s a sellout. If everything in the past, was negative though, that’s not selling out, right. So there, there’s all these... these little things that you know can change from sellout to buying in, but a person simply on the path to their own personal greatness, trying to accomplish more than... maybe a previous generation, or, simply more for them at that point in their life, that’s buying in, but they have to be very... cognizant of, okay, well I’m buying in, but that does not mean.... I’m completely surrendering to whatever system it is that I’m buying into. So, just because I’m giving all of my effort and energy and enthusiasm to you know this university, doesn’t mean that there aren’t things that I’m gonna still require and what of that university in terms of myself or my people. There are changes that I still wanna, you know see made. You know, there are programs and, and things that I want to see implemented.

For William, he desired for code switching to be less of a concern, arguing “buying in” should be the aim.

Even with all the examples of how these men code switched, for the most part few of the men liked the idea of code switching. When discussing the idea of muting,

tempering, or not fully being themselves, many of the men retreated from the label of code switching. Despite their perceived dislike for the terminology, several of the men described code switching as a prerequisite for success, both at the PWI and in life beyond the college environment.

Clique matters. The theme “Clique Matters” references the many comments made about friendships and social connections with peers. The men reflected upon making friends in a variety of ways, including during the new student welcome weekend, living in the residence halls, participating in student organizations, going to the multicultural center, and through athletics. The importance of being around other Blacks was also a topic of discussion. A few significant experiences related to “Clique Matters” are shared here.

The men continually talked about their Black friends. When asked about the importance of being around other Black people there were a variety of responses. In general the men shared having Black friends was important to their social life. However, they seemed to feel guilty saying being around Black men was not important in their retention.

William may have summarized the conflicted responses the men gave best. When asked about the importance of being around Black people he said, “Very”. After pausing he continued:

But... and again, this is gonna be misconstrued possibly, I don't want... It's not the end all to be all, right. So... I don't need... to be at a historically Black college or university. There is tremendous value at those institutions. But there is a value that those institutions cannot fully give you I feel. So, I need to be around people of color, Black people, particularly Black men for a variety of reasons, one, because I love to give back, one I lo—or another I love to mentor, three, I simply need to see people who look like me so that I know, whew, I'm not the

only person goin' through whatever it is that I'm goin' through in this space and time.

The rest of William's thought about this reflected back on the need for Black men to adapt at the PWI in order to prepare for life after graduation. William, like many of the other men in this study, described meeting friends through living in the residence halls, participating in student organizations, and going to the multicultural center.

For many of the men they felt they had to work harder at meeting Black men than they did in high school. Terrance lamented about how challenging it was to find other Black men on campus in comparison to high school. He added that the absence of the multicultural center would make finding Black men even more difficult.

Eric added another aspect of cliques mattering. He added that being an athlete made it easy to make friends, typically with other athletes, of all races. When asked how he met people Eric responded:

I didn't have to meet nobody...Because, I had my friends already. I came to the university with friends. And that's, I thought about this a while ago. Like, I never had to make friends, because... I had a recruiting visit. I'm, oh, I got recruited to go to [school here]. Like I had a recruiting visit. I knew people beforehand, and that I was gonna come here. And I already had my set a friends [that I met during the recruiting visit]. I didn't need to get new friends. My set of friends was my teammates automatically.

The cliques, or friendships, the men established aided their social integration. As the men discussed their cliques, the importance of being around other Blacks was also addressed.

Phil's thoughts about the importance of being around other Blacks basically summarizes the stance of the men in this study. Phil surmised, "Shit is easier with somebody who has your face". Even with this admission Phil, like his peers in this study,

was reluctant to say it was absolutely necessary to be around Black people to aid in retention. In fact, many of the men said being around Black classmates certainly helped with social integration, but having a Black clique did not impact their retention. Here again social integration was a bonus, but not a necessity for retention of the men in this study.

Research sub-question #2: What social integration or nonacademic themes do participants attribute to their retention at a public Midwestern PWI? There are a limited number of social integration themes that participants attribute to their retention. Experiences with student organizations and the campus multicultural center emerged as the major social integration factors attributed to supporting retention at this institution. Therefore the theme “Impactful Engagements” depicts the thematic finding that addresses the second research sub-question. Multiple participants articulated how their campus engagements were perceived to be connected to their retention.

Impactful engagements. The theme “Impactful Engagements” highlights the social integration experiences the men attributed to impacting their retention at the university. This included sharing their lived experiences with Greek life and other student organizations as well as experiences in the multicultural center. Responses to how the men felt the multicultural center contributed to their engagement and their retention re-introduces the sub-theme “Multicultural Center in the Mix” as also a finding for research sub-question #2.

Several of the men reported student organizations boosted their desire to stay at the institution. One of the organizations was identified as the Black student government. A second group was a newly formed organization focused on activism. Participation in

Greek life provided a third student organization type that was acknowledged as being impactful. Despite the perceived impact and positive recollections of experiences with these organizations the men mildly credited student organizations with being a factor for retention.

The Black student government organization was frequently mentioned as impactful to the social integration experience for Black men. Ronald ultimately agreed without Black student government it would be harder to remain at the university. He disclosed:

They're very helpful when it comes to like as far as resources, or, you know, things to do outside of college life, like social life and stuff like that. That right there, like, is like a big, big thing to like feel, keep me here and stuff, you know. 'Cause you know, there's always somebody you know, to guide you and stuff.

While Ronald praised the organization for contributing to his social life and retention others, like Eddie, were not willing to support that the organization contributed to their retention.

Eddie did not have a good initial interaction with the Black student government during his first year at the university. However, Eddie acknowledged the organization had the potential for supporting retention:

And I see the importance that they can have to a younger person, when done right. Earlier in my college career, [Black student government] was just, it was a mess to say the least. And it pushed me away. But now that it's... it's bein' picked back up, it can have—that also provides like a place of inclusiveness for... young Black people on campus. And it helps, I think that helps retention. Or it could.

These brief statements by Ronald and Eddie illustrated how several of the men felt about the role of Black student government in retention.

The newly formed organization focused on activism provided another impactful engagement opportunity for many of the men in this study. Telemanté reported the organization provided him an avenue to feel “normal”. When asked if the organization contributed to his desire to stay or leave, he responded:

No. Because... like I said, we're licking each other's wounds there. We all didn't wanna be there. We all didn't like being here. That, that's what... brought us together. We all did not like this place. We even... all things we did, we didn't like being here. We had friends here, we didn't like—we all said like, you didn't go out there, it's like we don't wanna be, we don't wanna be here, but we weren't happy with being here; we weren't.

Phil also stated he didn't want to be at the university, but the student organization gave him a sense of purpose. Phil shared, “Yeah, it's definitely helped me, help me feel like I need to be here”. He added, his desire to remain at the university is “stronger” because of his engagement with the student organization. The organization for activism provided impactful engagement, as did the Black student government.

In addition to these two groups, Greek student organizations were found to be impactful engagements for William, Ernie, Prentiss, and Eric. The majority of these men were members of Black Greek letter organizations, Prentiss was the only one of these four who held membership in a traditionally White Greek letter organization.

Prentiss described his fraternity life as:

Yeah, it's pretty strong bond. And, I mean my fraternity, like I said, they've always been positive to me, towards me. They've always you know, invited me to do the events that they do, they've never really excluded me, which I feel is great, because I mean although we have dif—differing cultures, they're still definitely welcoming, and they still definitely want me to participate in all their events, and all their socials and stuff like that, so.

Despite differing cultures Prentiss perceived his fraternity was inclusive. The other three Greek men in the study also felt their Greek affiliation had an impact on their social integration experiences.

Ernie discussed his fraternity was among one of the student organizations that gave him “comfort”. Similarly, William told of how his fraternity gave him the opportunity to see other Black men, which gave him “comfort”. When discussing comfort William admitted, “So it sounds like a lot a things [he has previously said] may contradict itself, but I don’t, I guess for me they don’t”. William acknowledged that he had previously discounted the notion of being comfortable, but ultimately realized the need for comfort in being able to relate to someone that looks like him.

When it came to fraternal membership for Eric, he noted how his fraternity contributed to his social integration by his fraternity connecting him to the campus multicultural center.

Multicultural center in the mix. As described in the findings for research sub-question #1, the sub-theme “Multicultural Center in the Mix” emerged as a representation of the center as a place of “normalcy” and “belonging”. The multicultural center provided these men resources for social integration. However, much like the student organizations, few of the men stated the center impacted their desire to leave or stay at the university.

Many of the men repeatedly described the multicultural center as meaningful for Black male undergraduates. Yet, they frequently discussed that it was not a factor in their retention. Ronald shared the center had no impact on his retention, but “it does inspire [him] to stay in college”. Phil added, “I think it’s picked up on my desire to stay”.

Similar to many of the men, Ronald expressed the multicultural center was a bonus but not a necessity for his retention.

Conversely, the men described the multicultural center was impactful on the retention of Black men in general. The impact on retention for others is exemplified by Phil when he explained what he thought campus would be like without a multicultural center:

I don't know. I would definitely be... callin' a lot more people racist. You know what I'm sayin'. I would be... I would, I would be clockin' some heads I feel like, if I had to hold all this shit in because there was nowhere that I could be... But if there wasn't a multicultural center, if there was no place that you know said on the building this is a place where all cultures are welcome, I don't think you would of attracted people to a place. I feel like everybody would sit in their dorms, or everybody would go to a house, or somethin', and everybody would feel like their voice isn't bein' heard and they're the quiet one, and they're the only person in their head that's goin' through this shit, and more people would drop out, I feel like.

Caught off-guard by his last comment, he was asked to clarify if he said people would "drop out". He leaned forward in his chair and emphatically stated, "More people would drop out".

When asked what he thought campus would be like without a multicultural center Telemanté responded, "Oh it'd be unbearable. It would be unbearable. I would not have been able to go through junior year. I don't know who the fuck I'd be. It would be unbearable. It would be terrible." When asked why it would be unbearable and what about junior year is significant he shared that the multicultural center provided him the opportunity to "reach out and touch a Black person". For Telemanté, as for several men in the study, the multicultural center provided a place to relieve stress and a social outlet.

The multicultural center also provided a sense of belonging, as described by the sub-theme “Multicultural Center in the Mix”.

Findings from this study indicate several Black male undergraduates desired a campus where they felt they a “sense of belonging”. Ronald remarked, “I think the, the biggest reason for... males leavin’ college, either because they don’t have a sense of belonging, you know, as a whole, or... financially they’re not stable enough you know, to maintain college”. Both of these reasons presented by Ronald are commonly referenced by other men in this study. When asking the men to remove the potential financial barrier, lacking sense of support and belonging beyond the multicultural center emerged as top reasons they believed Black men exited the university without degrees. Ronald’s comments address the theme of “Impactful Engagements” as well as provide a prelude to the next theme regarding financial aid.

Research sub-question #3: How important or insignificant is social integration when described in relation to Black male undergraduate retention?

Although the participants in this study told individual stories, the narratives they shared indicated one common finding regarding the importance of social integration in relation to retention. The men in this study all shared a common drive to not leave the institution without completing a degree. Findings indicated social integration held relatively small importance in the retention of Black males in this study.

Few of the men described social integration as essential to their retention at the research site. Conversely, they did credit social integration as an important factor for retention of other Black men at the research site and at other PWIs. For the majority of men in this study the themes “Money Matters”, “Not Leaving”, and sub-theme “Family

and Community Values” provide some explanation of the perceived importance of social integration in relation to Black male undergraduate retention.

Money matters. Most of men in this study ascribed little importance to social integration in relation to their own retention at the Midwestern PWI. When it came to degree completion, money was typically described as mattering for Black male undergraduate retention. Supporting ideologies surrounding the role of money led to the development of the theme “Money Matters”.

The men in this study were clear about the impact they believed money had on retention for them and their peers. Money, or lack thereof, was routinely mentioned as a factor in Black male undergraduate retention. In fact, money was mentioned as a reason for attrition much more than negative social integration experiences.

Most of the participants expressed a lack of financial support was detrimental to Black male retention. Money matters related to persistence at the institution were discussed by Isiah, William, Ernie, Telemanté, Phil, and Eric. Only Eric, Telemanté, and Phil were explicit about money being the reason for their retention at the university. Except for Terrance, the other men described money as being more of a factor for retention of other Black men, but not a primary issue for their retention.

When asked about leaving the university without a degree, Eric expressed, “Oh no, they pay me too much. (Laugh) No, I never thought, you know, I get, I get I get a good amount of scholarship money”. Eric acknowledged money was a factor in his retention at the institution and was the only participant to speak positively about money matters. Eric viewed staying at the university as a financial gain, while Telemanté and Phil discussed money matters from a totally different perspective.

Telemanté really wanted to leave the university, but described his inability to leave because of financial reasons. Many of the other universities of interest to him were much more expensive than his current institution. Telemanté received multiple tuition discounts that were a factor for him and his family to consider. Although he could leave, financially it did not make sense for Telemanté to earn an undergraduate education elsewhere. It seemed money matters had Telemanté stuck at the institution whether he wanted be there or not.

Being “stuck” is exactly how Phil described his inability to leave the university due to finances. When asked about if there were a time he ever thought about leaving the university but didn’t Phil lamented:

Hmm. No. I never thought about leaving the university, because there’s somethin’ about bein’ stuck that you can’t get out of. I’m, I’m here ‘cause I’m a transfer. I wanted to go to [a specialized] University to live, which is in San Francisco. 25 grand to live there. Comin’ from [community college] I was gettin’ 10 grand in tuition. [The specialized University] told me they would give me 18 grand in tuition. So \$7,000 in San Francisco don’t give you a lot a options right. So let’s go online, let’s try online. And... honestly I put this in the evaluation of the University. You guys have taught me nothing... I came here, and I was killin’ my teachers, you know what I’m sayin’? I’m here to hone my craft, but I also know as far as me leavin’, as far as me fillin’ out another tuition form, as far me payin’ another 50 bones for a, a college application, and transferrin’ and movin’, and makin’ new friends and findin’ out oh yawl say nigger too, it wasn’t worth it. There was no point. Just give me my mother fuckin’ degree, is how I feel at the end of it all. I graduate in December, and that’s, I swear to God, that’s how I feel. Just give me my degree and never speak to me again. You know, don’t ask me to donate no money, to your university. I will show up at these, you know, places, but if you want me to speak, you got, you got a Kanye West situation on your hands. You know what I mean? But, no, I never wanted to leave. But it’s not ‘cause I didn’t want to, it’s ‘cause I can’t.

This reflection demonstrates money mattered for Phil. He described being retained at the university because he felt he could not leave. Phil had already invested so much and his remaining options were limited due to finances.

Though Eric, Telemanté, and Phil were vocal in money matters for their retention, most of the other participants discussed money matters in relation to retention of others. With the exception of Terrance, the remaining participants expressed money was a major factor in retention for other Black men. Prentiss, Ronald, and Eddie specifically stated money was one reason they felt other Black male undergraduates did not persist to degree completion. While the men credited money matters for Black male retention, they also attributed their retention to factors unrelated to finances. In fact, these other factors were also unrelated to positive or negative social integration experiences at the university.

Not leaving. Overall none of the men argued social integration nor money were the sole reason their retention. Instead, the idea of not voluntarily leaving the university was salient for every single participant. The theme “Not Leaving” signaled how the majority of these men described their retention at the university. Over and over, the men discussed how they were not leaving, they refused to leave the institution without a degree.

Nearly every participant stated “I’m different” or described themselves as being different from their Black male peers leaving higher education without a degree. They literally and figuratively described being different as being driven and degree focused. Being driven and degree focused meant “not giving up” and keeping their eyes on the prize (graduation). Instead of expressing a relationship between social integration and

their retention, the men portrayed a relationship between their internal drive and retention.

Internal drive was part of what the men felt made them different. William stated, “I’m stubborn. I’m stubborn as hell. And I’d be the first one to tell you. But I’m very different as well. So—for me, there’s always been a deep, deep, deep appreciation for knowledge and intellect and education”. He went on to add:

And so the, the natural evolution of it all was okay, well, go get a Bachelor’s degree. And yeah, while there may have been some stumbles and, and things like that, the goal was always the same. But I think that that also was coupled with self-confidence. And... I don’t think Black men have as high a level of self-confidence and self-awareness of that confidence, and knowledge of their true value and potential as I found in myself. Again, I was very stubborn. I helped to instill all of those things in me. I’m not one for lack of confidence. That’s not cocky, I just understood what it was that I was good at. And unfortunately, most young Black men, what it is that they’re confident in usually only has—in the grand scheme of things, maybe a career span of 10 to 15 years, and that comes in athletics. No one ever trains them you know, in the classroom as they train as hard outside of the classroom.

William credited his internal drive as the difference between himself and other Black males that have not or will not persist to earn an undergraduate degree. William also alludes to some struggles along the way to earning his degree, which is correspondingly part of the discussion with other men in this study.

Recall at times Eddie felt invisible and had considered leaving early, yet decided to stay at the university. When asked if there was ever a time when he considered leaving the university, but didn’t, he replied:

Oh yeah. (Laughs) I—my very first semester... I didn’t do too hot. I got 1.5 GPA, and just crushed my soul. I’d never gotten bad grades. I was, did great throughout all school. And... I just thought the university wasn’t for me. I didn’t feel included, I wanted to go back [home]. And I went and took a tour of [another university in my hometown].

Eddie went on to say, “And I, I remember takin’ that tour and...I was really trying to convince myself to leave just because I didn’t necessarily like it here too much. But I’m very glad I didn’t”. He continued:

I felt, I felt kinda scared, like I said, it’s a, as if I was running away. And I just told myself no, I didn’t have that hot of the, a... semester. I feel like I’m the only Black kid in the city, but that’s not gonna stop me. And... I didn’t let it. And that was one, that was probably the biggest reason that I didn’t.

Eddie credited his internal drive. He refused to be stopped and decided to face the challenge of feeling excluded.

The drive to not leave and focus on degree completion was repeated throughout this study. Ernie continued the theme “Not Leaving” as he described himself as different and internally driven. Ernie said he was “systematic” and attributes his persistence to his personality. Although there was a time he thought about leaving early, he decided to stay because he was focused on earning his degree from the research site. Ernie shared how he had a negative experience with one of the academic support staff, but still decided to stay enrolled because of his internal motivation:

You know, I, I didn’t, I didn’t necessarily know if I wanted to stay here after not havin’ that support, you know what I mean, in that regard. But again... I guess... I had to diagnose myself internally. You know, and I do that, it’s on a continual basis. And, you know, looking at the end goal, and then sayin’ okay well what do I need to do to get to that end goal.

Ernie showed his resilience despite this chilling experience.

That sense of the end goal was salient for each of the men. Every single participant was focused on earning their degree from the public Midwestern PWI. The men in this study exemplified the theme “Not Leaving” was more important to their retention than social integration.

Family and community values. In addition to not leaving and being degree focused, many of the men reflected on the role of family and community in their persistence. This focus brought forth the sub-theme “Family and Community Values”. The theme “Not Leaving” depicts the primary interpretation of the undergraduate retention of the men in this study. However it became evident that their internal drive came from the family and community values instilled in the men prior to coming to college. In many cases family was described as an important factor in why the men persisted to degree completion at the PWI.

There are several examples of how “Family and Community Values” is a sub-theme of “Not Leaving”. For instance, William said his mother “subconsciously rooted” his desire to earn a degree. Isiah stated:

So my grandparents have always instilled in me that, you know, school is was first, school was important. And it’s just like I don’t know what I would be doin’ if I wasn’t in school. I couldn’t, you know, face my parents if I didn’t go to school.

A few of the participants discussed the role of extended family. In some cases grandparents were described as primary caregivers and of primary concern. For example, Ernie painted a vivid picture of the role his grandfather played on his persistence to degree completion. He stated:

...Once I graduate, you know, I’ll be the first male, and I guess my grandfather, so my grandfather’s first grandchild that’s a male to you know graduate from you know the university and things a that nature. And it’s like yeah, as he’s getting older, I’m just like well shoot. You know I mean life (Laugh) life can end any time now that he’s getting’ older. So that’s caused stress on like you know I gotta get done with this, you know. And then you know when you get into a, jump into I guess run into a hurdle academically, it’s just like well shoot, now I’m into this barrier, I gotta get over this barrier ‘cause I’m, I’m beatin’, I’m playin’ against time, you know, I mean if somethin’ happens to him, you know, I mean I want

him to, you know, see me graduate, I want him to, you know, be there, you know, as I finish and things a that nature.

A sense of pride could be heard in Ernie's voice as he expressed his focus on finishing despite obstacles along the way.

The community, like family, had an impact with supporting retention at the university. Ronald revealed why he was in college and why he had remained in college thus far:

I think the reason I will graduate, 'cause I, I had a, like a mentor, like. And... back then, like in high school, like I wasn't too big on like on school or college. Like I did, really didn't look into that, but, until I had a mentor who got [into] my life... and told me, like, it's hard to get stuff with like just a high school diploma. And, now he had told about a, some kind a degree. A, a Bachelor, specifically. That, and he, he's what motivate[d] me to like stay in college and go to, actually go to college and continue on, you know.

Although Ronald had shared the value of money and social integration it was also clear he believed that community support was important in his retention.

Research sub-question #4: What social integration initiatives do participants believe student affairs should employ, revise, or remove to increase Black male undergraduate retention? The emergent theme "Institutional Control" and the sub-theme "An Academic Affair" addressed the fourth, and final research sub-question. There was very little that the participants felt student affairs should do to increase Black male retention. Social integration was described as a means of comfort, with minimal description as a contributor to the retention of the men in this study.

In some cases the men discussed a desire for continuance of existing mechanisms for social integration. For the most part the men concentrated on issues that went beyond the scope of student affairs. "Institutional Control" and the sub-theme "An Academic

Affair” pertain to the initiatives the participants believed would increase Black male undergraduate retention.

Institutional control. Over and over, the informants for this investigation discussed the role of the institution in providing a sense of belonging for Black men. In some cases, the men were intentional to state that this sense should occur beyond the campus multicultural center. Although the participants were advised this study focused on outside the classroom experiences plenty of academic integration issues emerged.

In terms of social integration, nine of the participants praised the institution for erecting a new multicultural center. The center was continuously described as a place where they felt comfort. All ten of the men discussed how the center aided their social integration or had the potential for being a resource for other Black men. In addition to the opportunities for social integration the participants were appreciative of the center for multiple reasons, including being an important institutional symbol and physical facility for student support.

Despite admittedly spending a limited amount of time in the multicultural center, both Prentiss and Telemanté expressed their appreciation for the center. Prentiss shared:

So... I feel like, and just the fact that they made a brand new multicultural center, says something about, you know, them wanting to accept minorities at this campus more. So. ‘Cause I, I heard before it was just some like old rundown building. (Laugh) That’s what I heard anyway. But yeah. But now I mean it’s... pretty much one a the best buildings on campus. It’s really renovated, really... really new, and it’s, it’s...it’s a great environment to be in.

Telemanté described the physical symbolism of the multicultural center from his perspective:

I knew that, okay this school built a building to house all these Black people. At least they built a building for us so that I know that they know we are, we exist,

you know. And, at least they know we exist, you know what I'm saying. So if it wasn't there, I would think that this school doesn't give a shit if I'm here or not. And that would of, that would a turned fully antagonistic through me. You know what I'm saying. It'd be a disaster man. Disaster. And what I mean by disaster, is like I just, it, school would be just way harder, and I'd be way less happy than I am now. I'm not, I'm not. I, I'm not happy, which is sad, like I'm not happy, which is a shame. But... it would be worse if there wasn't the [multicultural center]. And I'm not even there a lot. Shit. I'm not even know, I'm not part of [one of the academic support programs], none of that shit. I'm not part of any Black groups, nothin'. I am the guy that walks by that thing, and I'm saying if it wasn't there it'd suck. I, I, I would say that before I even stepped in that building.

While men like Prentiss and Telemanté rarely stepped into the building their first couple years on campus, but found it meaningful, there were men in this study who frequented the building. Frequent users shared similar responses as Terrance regarding the relevance and meaningfulness of the building. Among many other praises Terrance called it a “home away from home”.

Even with the creation of a multicultural center many of the men discussed some unmet expectations of the institution. Along those lines the category “Responsibility” continued to emerge within the theme “Institutional Control”. William described himself as “expecting different things from the institution”. Among his expectations he included, “...an environment where I felt (he pauses), not that I necessarily felt excluded, but something that was more purposefully inclusive, or was purposely mine, right”. As William explains more about his expectations he shifts into outlining particular academic elements that support the sub-theme of “An Academic Affair”.

An academic affair. Despite being instructed this study centered on out of class experiences the participants continuously mentioned academic issues beyond the scope of student affairs. The frequent discussion of issues within the academic arena led to the development of the sub-theme “An Academic Affair”. This sub-theme points to a

number of academic matters within institutional control. These issues were mainly relative to curriculum and comfort. The label “Reform” is the primary category that summarizes this sub-theme.

For instance, several men felt their peers needed to reform their study habits and focus on academics. Some men pointed to academics as a reason for Black male undergraduate attrition. In this case, Isiah, Phil, Telemanté, and Terrance, each specifically mentioned many Black male degree completion challenges are related to academics or a lack of focus on academics. Terrance insisted the reason why many Black males do not graduate is a mix of internal drive and academic rigor. Terrance shared why he felt Black males are not graduating from college, stating:

I don’t think, personally I don’t think they... they wanna try. They just don’t real—wanna try as hard as they need to. I feel like they think it’s gonna be like high school, or they come in here, socialize, stay up till 4:00 every morning playin’ 2K, doors always open. Somebody need to like close the door, do your homework, wake up and go to class. It’s all like, when you go to class you get a syllabus, you know what to do. You know when everything’s gonna be due. But it comes with the maturity. It wasn’t like that in high school.

Phil seemed to concur with Terrance’s assessment. Phil shared why he believed Black males leave without completing a degree:

I don’t know. I feel like that’s really scary. I don’t know what goes on in other, in other Black kids’ heads. My brother didn’t graduate, he dropped out also. But, he’s ‘bout that turn up, if you was ‘bout that turn up you probably shouldn’t be in college, you know what I’m sayin’. He liked to party, he... didn’t really go to class, and didn’t really do his homework. And I feel like that has a, a lot to do with the cushiness of like the public education system. Grade, you know grades don’t matter in high school, they gonna let you go. You can repeat the grade if you want, but if you got a D, you get to go. You in college, you got a C, that’s, you better at least have a C. And he wasn’t makin’ it happen, and so he just couldn’t go anymore.

Both Phil and Terrance are critical of the high school preparation received prior to college, and they are also critical of their peers' lack of concentration on academics. It could be said they are calling for a reform of high school academic rigor and reform of academic work ethic. This notion of reform is interwoven throughout this sub-theme.

The idea of reform also represented what participants wanted to occur with the college curriculum and faculty hiring. Nearly every single participant called for the institution to make reforms to the curriculum and hire Black faculty. They argued both would help improve Black male degree completion.

The concept of curricular reform was mentioned by multiple participants. William was specific in the curricular reforms that he desired from the institution. His second year at the university he began working with another student to investigate the possibility of the university adding "an African American slash Black studies major". Getting this added to the curriculum during his tenure at the university was among one of his unmet expectations from the institution. William basically called for more opportunities to increase awareness of Black culture, which he felt would increase chances for positive social integration experiences.

On a similar note Phil discussed how exhausting it is to have to "educate" others about Black history. Phil argued discussion of Black history in university classrooms is limited and questioned why the limitations existed within the curriculum. In the end Phil lamented that he and members of the Black community should not be responsible for educating themselves and their peers about Black history and culture.

Telemanté added to the conversation about curricular reform. He called for more opportunities to showcase what he was good at academically. He criticized his academic

program and his peers stating, "...they need to fix the program so students will be able to write and be able to be, you know, to speak and read books". Telemanté felt this curriculum reform would help him and his classmates.

The desire for curricular reform was evident in the findings for this investigation. When asked what suggestions he had for improving Black male degree completion at the research site Eric responded:

Um... what would I do? I'll say... I can say... if... we could, I'll probably ask to... what, you know what they do with engineers, that they have like, uh... a extra class that has no credit hours, that's just a way for them to—I think it's something like that. Like how like, for African American students to have like some type of extra class or something to add, that they have to go through, and it could be a credit hour, could not. Depending on like what the course content is in it. And that could... and that could find a way to like... help students succeed,. You know have somebody there who like went to the, who probably had the same experience as them, and like, findin' like these, that, like a professor, and then that can also end up bein' like a mentor thing, because I know also at Engineering they have like eventually get like a, a engine—another engineer study in there, and they'll be like the, their mentor in a sense. And that's how they make friends too. And then that could be a way to increase... males to, black males to graduate.

This passage shows Eric advised for curricular reform and hiring Black faculty. Like Eric, many of the participants also called for a reform in faculty hiring. Specifically, they routinely suggested hiring Black faculty for the purposes of mentorship and instruction.

The desire for an external reflection at the head of the classroom was evident. Each of the men were asked to pretend they were in charge of the university and share what they would do to increase Black male degree attainment. Telemanté promptly responded, "What would I do to increase black male degree completion? Hire Black faulty. Hire Black faculty". From his perspective, Black students had few role models, or external reflections of academic success on the campus. This lack of external

reflection prompted Telemanté to purposely not attempt to make connections with any professors, something he now regrets.

Some men were intentional in desiring Black faculty in their academic major, while others wanted Black professors and advisors throughout campus. Also pretending he was in charge of the university, Terrance retorted:

Uh... think I would add more Black teachers in like every department. 'Cause I'm a [unnamed] major. We don't have any. And when I was [a different] major, I, we might of had one, but I never made it that far. And that's 'cause I heard about somebody who like we might of had. But I feel like havin' a, we all, we have like Black advisors, but havin' a Black teacher would like make a difference too I think.

It was evident that the men in this study wanted to see an external reflection leading the classroom. This reflection was perceived to be an aid in social integration and support increasing degree completion for Black males. Over and over the men described the type of comfort having a Black professor would provide.

The men sought comfort through the external reflection of a Black face because it was clear they felt discomfort in their academic spaces. The perceived need to remove the discomfort these Black men had within their academic facilities was another area of "Reform" that emerged from this study. However, this was not originally coded or categorized as "Reform", but after more data analysis the category fit.

At least half the participants described the discomfort they had within the various academic homes for their major. Isiah shared how he felt within an entire academic facility:

I can't, I can never say I, I never feel actually comfortable in a class. Again, mostly because I am the only African American. But even just walkin' through the halls, it's like, you don't see too many African Americans there. So it's, I would say (pause) that to be honest with you. (Laugh) I don't think there is

anywhere else besides the [multicultural center], that if I, if I walked into I could feel like, like, you know, I'm with people that are similar to me. I am, you know, one of these people, or I do feel comfortable.

For Telemanté “An Academic Affair” described a lot about him and his experience at the university. Though asked about his outside of class experiences, he continually described his academic environment. Telemanté discussed being Black at a PWI added additional challenges to being academically successful. In fact, he generally described PWIs as “toxic environments for non-White people”. In the end, hiring Black faculty was his answer to alleviate these harmful environments. These responses from Telemanté were representative of the theme “An Academic Affair”.

Summary

This chapter provided insight into the lived experiences of ten undergraduate Black male persisters at a public Midwestern predominantly White institution. The purpose of this investigation was to better understand how social integration impacted retention for these men. The central question guiding this study was: *What meaning do Black male undergraduate persisters give to social integration and their retention at a PWI?* Four research sub-questions were utilized to assist in getting to the essence of the central research question.

Eight themes and three sub-themes emerged from the data collection and analysis. These themes were presented as findings of the study. The themes indicate the participants in this study had a mixture of experiences at the PWI; however it was clear each of these men attributed their retention to their internal drive. The participants expressed they were internally driven and not leaving without a degree, regardless of social integration experiences. Social integration was interpreted as more of a bonus and not a requisite for retention of the participants in this study.

Based on the experiences of the participants in this study, social integration was not an important factor contributing to their retention at the PWI. These same individuals, however, described social integration as an important factor for other Black males at PWIs, including the research site. The participants also described a number of other factors they felt were relative to Black male retention at PWIs. Examples included finances, academic issues, and institutional issues beyond student affairs or outside of class experiences. These institutional and academic issues were perceived to be related to comfort and retention. The following chapter provides discussion of implications of these findings.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

Introduction

Higher education has recently and historically been challenged to increase undergraduate degree attainment. Lately the matter of student retention has become an issue of national concern, including a focus on increasing Black male undergraduate degree attainment. Scholars like Vincent Tinto (1987, 1993) conducted research to explain student persistence and attrition well before the recent national focus. His findings identified the majority of students voluntarily leave institutions for nonacademic reasons that occur outside of class. Tinto labeled these nonacademic experiences *social integration*. The concept of social integration as a factor in student retention provided the theoretical foundation for this study.

The purpose of this research study was to use a phenomenological qualitative approach to explore how social integration contributed to retention of undergraduate Black male persisters at one public Midwestern PWI. On many campuses, social integration is primarily facilitated by a division of student affairs. Findings from this study provide implications for improving student retention and the experiences of Black male undergraduates at the site of this study.

Data collection and analysis from face to face semi-structured interviews with ten undergraduate Black male persisters led to the emergence of eight themes and three sub-themes. These themes emerged from interpretation of the lived experiences of the ten participants in this study and were detailed in the previous chapter. Implications of these themes are presented in this chapter. Although qualitative research is not generalizable, results of this study are consistent with prior research on Black male undergraduates

(Cuyjet, 2006; Guiffrida, 2003, 2005, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Jones, 2010; Patton, 2010). In light of the linkage to prior research, results of this study may be considered for transferability beyond the research site.

Significance

This study remains significant to American society, postsecondary institutions, and research on student retention and persistence. Findings from this study shine light on Black male retention from the perspectives of ten undergraduate persisters. As previously detailed, there are real consequences for multiple stakeholders if Black male undergraduate degree completion is not increased.

For America, there are several benefits of college degree completion. In some cases the benefits are individualistic while also valuable to greater American society. As individuals, American citizens, including Black men, can ill afford to continue historical and current persistence, retention, and degree completion trends. Individual advantages of earning a college degree includes the ability to secure employment at higher earning wages than those without a postsecondary education (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Along those lines, a benefit to greater society includes college-educated people are more likely to pay taxes and rely less on “social service[s]” (Neisler, 1992).

For postsecondary institutions there are multiple implications for reducing student attrition, especially for public institutions. For public institutions of higher education the continued trend of attrition risks not fulfilling their mission to serve people of the state. Likewise, as competition for state and federal resources heightens, retaining and graduating every student has to matter.

The relevance of this study is clear for Student Affairs at the research site. Student Affairs at the research site holds primary responsibility for social integration, or

what occurs beyond the classroom. This study provides information about social integration directly from the memories of men that have years of positive and negative social integration experiences. While few in number, their experiences should not be ignored.

Finally, from a research perspective, this study is significant in multiple ways. For instance, there is relatively little research on the lived experiences of undergraduate Black men, this study assists in filling the research gap on this population. Furthermore, the majority of research on retention and degree completion is skewed toward focus on attrition, or those students leaving the institution. As Tinto (2012) pointed out, there needs to be more research to better understand why students are retained and what role the institution had in retention. This need is necessary for all undergraduate populations and multiple institution types. This study adds to the research concentrating on staying rather than investigations centered on attrition, with a focus on America's least retained at one PWI.

Limitations

After completing this investigation it became apparent there is one limitation to this study worth noting. As stated in Chapter One, student departure theory consists of academic and social integration. Thus solely focusing on social integration presents a limitation to this study because it ignores other elements of the theory and the campus, such as academic integration or experiences in the classroom.

Consistent with the tradition of qualitative research, this study had a limited and relatively small number of participants, however this proved not to be a limitation. The nature of phenomenological research is to capture the lived experiences of as few as five individuals (Polkinghorne, as cited in Creswell, 2007), while Creswell (2007) called for

no more than ten participants. In this study, patterns in the responses of participants began emerging after the sixth interview. The additional five interviews conducted affirmed these patterns.

The strength of qualitative phenomenology is gaining a better understanding of the participants' lived experiences, not the ability to make broad generalizations. Results of this study may not be generalizable, but they are significant for the research site. One way to evaluate the results for a qualitative study is to compare the findings to previous literature. Findings from this study are reflective of literature on experiences of Black males at PWIs (Cuyjet, 2006; Guiffida, 2003, 2005, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Jones, 2010; Patton, 2010).

Summary of Findings and Discussion

This section of the chapter provides a summary of findings and comparisons to prior research, especially literature reviewed and presented in Chapter Two. Earlier research by Tinto (1987, 1993, 2012) argued social integration was a major factor in student retention. On the other hand, some critics (Allen, 1992; Guiffida, 2005, 2006) cautioned the use of Tinto's theory for ethnic and racial minorities, including undergraduate Black men. With this in mind, the purpose of this study was to explore how social integration contributed to retention of undergraduate Black male persisters at one public Midwestern predominantly White institution. The central question guiding this research study was: *What meaning do Black male undergraduate persisters give to social integration and their retention at a PWI?* Four research sub-questions were developed to assist in answering the central question.

As detailed in the previous chapter, eight themes and three sub-themes emerged from analysis of data collected from 10 undergraduate Black male persisters. The

compilation of themes responding to the four research sub-questions identified answers to the central research question. Overall the findings indicate Black male undergraduates in this study viewed social integration as important, but not essential for their retention. This perceived connection for the men in this study is consistent with other research (Jones, 2010) on Black male retention and social integration.

Several themes demonstrate the meaning undergraduate Black male persisters gave to social integration, while the findings related to research sub-question #3 demonstrate the importance of social integration in relation to undergraduate Black male retention. For the most part the men in this study associated the meaning of social integration with comfort. The stories shared demonstrated value in social integration, however they did not feel social integration was essential for their retention at the PWI. This finding matches with conclusions by Tinto (2012). Tinto declared social integration “enhances students’ attachment or commitment to the institution and their willingness to remain enrolled” (p. 28). The men in this study were agreeable that social integration made the university more “bearable”, yet it was not the reason they remained enrolled. Instead, they credited social integration as more valuable for retention of Black men not in this study.

It is mutually beneficial for the university and students to have positive experiences. Altruistically the institution should want students to have a better experience than feeling stuck or eager to graduate and turn their back on the institution. From a financial perspective this type of experience has at least two potentially negative impacts. First, from a recruitment perspective the institution would not want Black males to discourage potential enrollees from attending. In the digital age of the 21st century,

one negative experience has the potential to be broadcasted worldwide in a matter of minutes. Second, poor experiences at the institution cannot be favorable for the prospect of alumni giving. Ultimately the institution should seek to provide students with a positive experience where they feel some level of comfort.

Although Tinto's (1987, 1993) student departure theory is a popularly used model for studying student retention there are valid arguments to the application of his theory for minority populations. As the men from this study found their comfort they described "Adapting Here" as part of their social integration experience. The ability to adapt from their primary Black home communities to the predominantly White campus resembled the transition stage Tinto described. However, the men were consistent in their reluctance to allow separation from their home community. These findings indicate the ability to conform to White culture and maintain Black identity, as explained by Rodgers and Summers (2008) and Du Bois (2003), was present for many of the men in this study. Several of the men even described the necessity of being able to navigate between their Black world and the "real world" that is predominantly White.

Code switching, or double-consciousness seemed to allow for maintenance of ties to home while successfully navigating the PWI. Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory did not account for the ability to stay connected to Black identity as well as family and home community that many of the participants acknowledged as real, and in some cases necessary, for their survival at the institution. These beliefs match the plea for modification of applying student departure theory to minority students (Guiffrida, 2006; Kuh & Love, 2000), especially for Black male undergraduates at PWIs.

In addition to the ability to adapt to the PWI environment, the participants discussed two specific promoters of positive social integration. The theme “Impactful Engagements” and sub-theme “Multicultural Center in the Mix” represent social integration experiences the men in this study attributed as impactful on their retention. They specially reported valuing the campus multicultural center and involvement with student organizations. The multicultural center and student organizations, especially ethnic minority based student organizations seemed to provide a place of comfort where these Black men could be themselves and meet other Blacks.

Results with regard to the multicultural center support existing literature (Kuh & Love, 2000; Patton, 2006, 2010; Seidman, 2005b; Tinto, 2012) demonstrating these physical spaces provide a means of positive social integration for minority students at PWIs. Likewise, the findings concerning student organizations are consistent with prior research regarding social integration (Astin, 1977, 1987, 1993, 1996; Fischer, 2007; Guiffrida, 2003; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Tinto, 1987, 1993). Despite the comfort provided by social integration through student organizations and the multicultural center, it appeared social integration and retention of men in this study were loosely coupled.

The depiction of the relation between social integration and retention is congruent with what Allen (1992) concluded regarding social integration and Black student retention at PWIs. Results from Allen’s quantitative study surmised Black students were able to persist at PWIs without being socially integrated (p. 41). Discussion of themes associated with research sub-question three support the argument that social integration was not necessary for undergraduate Black male retention.

Research sub-question #3 focused on the perceived importance of social integration in relation to undergraduate Black male retention at the research site. While participants in this study told individual stories, the lived experiences they shared indicated a common finding regarding the importance of social integration in relation to retention. Participants consistently reported nothing that occurred outside the class would push them to leave the PWI without a degree. For the majority of men in this study the themes “Money Matters”, “Not Leaving”, and sub-theme “Family and Community Values” provided explanation of the perceived importance of social integration in relation to undergraduate Black male retention.

The theme “Money Matters” represents a perceived major reason for retention or attrition, and an area not thoroughly discussed for the literature review in Chapter Two. In general several of the men in this study felt money was an important factor in Black male degree completion. This is consistent with prior research, but merits further consideration as Tinto (1993) argued monetary constraints are not always the actual reason for early departure. He described “their true reasons often reflect other forces not associated with finances, such as dissatisfaction with the institution” (p. 88).

Money matters in student retention, but finances are not always the true factor in student attrition, even when students claim the reason for leaving early is related to money. Tinto (1993) argued, “...when students are satisfied with their institutional experience, they often are willing to accept considerable economic hardships in order to continue. For them, the benefits of attendance more than justify costs” (p. 88). Tinto (2012) later wrote, “A cautionary note about the impact of financial support is warranted”, adding sometimes people “may choose to leave college, even with little

financial pressure” (p. 31). Money matters in student leaving and staying, but there are other factors also worthy of consideration.

The theme “Not Leaving” also represents a concept of minimal discussion during the literature review. In sum this theme symbolizes a focus on individual determination to persist at the PWI. “Not Leaving” is less about social integration and retention, but more about what Tinto (2012) later recognized. He acknowledged, “Some individuals succeed by sheer willpower, skill, and perseverance, even when conditions would appear to militate against success. Others do not succeed even when placed in settings that are conducive to success” (p. 8). When it came to their retention at the Midwestern PWI, the men felt their willpower was more vital to their retention than social integration.

Beyond willpower and money, the participants in this study also perceived the role of their family and community to be influential in their retention. The sub-theme “Family and Community Values” emerged as a reflection of this perceived influence. It was clear, for the men in this study, attachment to home community was positively impactful on their desire to attend college and maintain enrollment through graduation. This theme was directly in contradiction of Tinto’s (1987) student departure theory and in-line with those (Allen, 1992; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Guiffrida, 2005; Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2011) advocating for a revision of Tinto’s theory when applied to minority students.

Several men, like William, Isiah, Ernie, and Ronald, were overt in sharing that their family and community played a positive role in their retention at the university. For these men, separation from home was not an option they wanted to pursue, nor did they envision a need to separate from their past in order to earn their degree. However,

several of the participants did acknowledge the need to be cautious of home community connections that could be detrimental to degree completion. The reluctance to disassociate with potentially negative people from home gives some credence to Tinto's (1993) revised theory that acknowledged the difficulty of separation for minority populations.

The remaining themes that emerged from this study do not address the central research question. Despite disassociation to addressing the primary research question, these remaining themes "Mixed Bag of Things", "Always Representing", "Clique Matters", "Institutional Control", and the sub-theme "An Academic Affair" are worthy of discussion, as these themes are consistent with prior research. Some of the existing literature relative to these themes is outlined in Chapter Two and within the following section.

Many of the themes from this study are congruent with existing literature. For instance the mix of inclusive and exclusionary experiences the men discussed are similar to prior evidence. Strayhorn (2013) found many Black men at PWIs find the environment uncomfortable. Tinto (2012) argued campus environments can simultaneously be uncomfortable and comfortable. He claimed, "...students may feel a sense of belonging with one community but not with others or with the institution generally" (p. 67). Tinto essentially described how the men in this study experienced social integration in some areas while sensing exclusion in other areas of campus.

The concepts from the theme "Always Representing" matched existing research relative to image and identity development for Black male college students at PWIs. Cuyjet (2006) pointed out, Black men at PWIs are regularly assumed to be athletes; this

was the case for several of the men at this Midwestern PWI. In terms of identity development, similar to Guiffrida's (2003) findings, multiple participants depicted the initial uneasiness of making friends with other Black males.

The theme "Clique Matters" represented ways participants made friends and social connections with peers. Many of the men from in-state had friends from high school attending the university. These friends were the initial clique, but eventually new friends were made. Strayhorn and DeVita (2010) argued Black male collegians have been reluctant to establish "supportive relationships" with peers (p. 88). With the exception of Telemanté, the men in this study rarely described being hesitant to make friends with other Black men or peers of any race.

The theme "Institutional Control" and sub-theme "An Academic Affair" indicate that both social integration and academic integration were deemed a factor in the retention of Black male undergraduates at the Midwestern PWI. These findings are consistent with Tinto's (1993) interpretation that both academic and social integration are "interdependent" (p. 118). Climate inside and outside of academic spaces, curriculum, and the faculty leading instruction were each deemed important for increasing Black male retention and degree completion. These results certainly have implications for the public Midwestern PWI utilized at the site for this investigation.

Recommendations

"In the world of action, what matters are not our theories per se, but how they help institutions address pressing practical issues of persistence."

— Vincent Tinto

The above quote by Tinto (2006, p. 6) alludes to the upcoming shift from sharing theory and findings to discussion of recommendations for practice. Scholars (Kuh, 2009;

Tinto, 2012) have acknowledged both students and postsecondary institutions play a role in student retention. Results of this study support this argument that both students and the institution have a role in retention. Findings indicate participants did not view social integration as a primary reason for their retention at the Midwestern PWI. The Black men in this study described social integration as an element in their comfort and as a plus factor in their retention at the PWI. Yet, these same men argued social integration was important for retention of other Black males at this PWI and other PWIs. These findings regarding social integration and retention at the research site provide some practical implications for Student Affairs professionals and future research at the Midwestern PWI.

For student affairs. Interpretation of findings from this study lead to four recommendations for Student Affairs at the public Midwestern PWI that served as the research site. Again, findings from this study indicate for ten undergraduate Black men negative social integration experiences could not drive them to leave early. However, the participants did believe social integration was among the reasons their undergraduate Black male peers were not retained. Likewise, they shared positive social integration experiences had a positive impact on their retention at the PWI. These findings support that Student Affairs at the research site can have an impact on undergraduate retention and degree completion for Black men.

Thus, the first recommendation for Student Affairs is centered on valuing the theme “Impactful Engagements”. This theme brings to light the positive social integration experiences the men attributed to impacting their retention at the PWI. Results from this study indicated the campus multicultural center and student organizations provided impactful engagements for the undergraduate Black men in this

study. Based on the experiences of the participants in this study, the PWI that served as the research site should evaluate whether programs developed to provide integration opportunities for Black males are accomplishing their intent and, if not, make necessary revision. There may be a need for refinement or development of new processes to promote early positive social integration by way of student organizations and the campus multicultural center. In addition, new programs to purposefully facilitate positive social integration may also be necessary.

The second recommendation for Student Affairs is related to assessing the need for creating more spaces for Black males to have impactful engagements. The men in this study consistently called for seeing someone that, as Phil stated, “had my face”. The multicultural center provided opportunities for the participants to meet and see people that looked like them, but the men in this study desired having this external reflection beyond one space on the predominantly White campus. Men in this study proclaimed that undergraduate Black men need to feel normalcy in spaces beyond the campus multicultural center. Their experiences were a “Mixed Bag of Things” and few of the men in this study described feeling a sense of normalcy or fully socially integrated throughout campus.

A third recommendation relates to Student Affairs examining existing processes for linking undergraduate Black men with Black male professionals and other professional men of color. The men in this study consistently called for wanting to see professionals that could be mentors. Therefore, Student Affairs leadership may want to examine how staff make purposeful connections with Black male undergraduates. While much of the discussion regarding the desire for external reflections centered on the

classroom, there was also a shared desire for more ethnic minority staff and administrators of color to have a presence beyond the departments in the multicultural center.

This alludes to the fourth recommendation for Student Affairs at the site for research. The reported lack of an external reflection signals a need for review of recruitment and hiring practices for Student Affairs professionals. This review may reveal gaps in identifying talented professionals of color, especially Black men, to join the Student Affairs staff at the research site.

For future research. This study generally adds to the limited amount of research on students that are retained, and specifically adds to the even more limited data on Black male undergraduate persisters. Tinto (2012) argued,

Much of the research on student attrition has not been particularly useful to those in the field who seek to develop and implement programs to improve retention and completion because it assumes, incorrectly, that knowing why students leave is equivalent to knowing why students stay and succeed. (p. 5)

Similarly, Cuyjet (1997) encouraged researching African American men persisting at PWIs to gain a better understanding of how these men have been successful “to better serve these students and their brothers who will follow them” (p. 95). This study built on prior literature and addressed the call for focus on student persisters, particularly Black men retained at a PWI. However, more research on Black male persisters and degree recipients from this site can aid the already useful findings from this investigation. As such, the first recommendation for future research is to continue focusing on persisters, especially undergraduate Black males.

As this focus on Black men persists continues, the second recommendation is to learn more about the individual characteristics of undergraduate Black males at the PWI. The 10 men in the study discussed an internal drive to complete their degree, however it can safely be assumed that not every student has such a drive. Findings indicate a need for more attention on pre-college and personal attributes. Results indicated social integration was more of a plus factor than an important determinant in the retention of the 10 Black men in this study. Instead, the men in this study continuously and uniformly referred to their personal characteristics as an important factor for their retention at the research site. This points to a need for exploration of the “grit” Strayhorn (2014, p. 1) has researched. Strayhorn found that non-cognitive factors like grit or individual determination of Black male collegians at PWIs had greater impact on college outcomes than cognitive factors (p. 7). Future research on Black male persisters at this PWI should consider learning more about pre-college and personal attributes like grit.

While gaining a better understanding about the climate for social integration, findings from this study unintentionally identified academic integration had a role in retention of Black males at the research site. Discussion of academics and what was happening in the classroom continuously emerged during data collection and analysis. While this study provided practical applications for Student Affairs at the research site, future research at this PWI should consider avoiding partial use of student departure theory. More intentional focus on experiences inside and outside the classroom may reveal additional data to support the degree completion of America’s least retained population. It is recommended that future research at this site seeks to better understand

the role of academic and social integration in regards to undergraduate Black male retention.

Findings from this study may not be generalizable, nor mandate governmental or institutional action, but the results provide an avenue to discuss how Student Affairs at one Midwestern PWI contributed to enhance undergraduate persistence, retention, and degree attainment of Black males. Future research at this site following the previously outlined recommendations should aid in assisting Student Affairs and institutional leaders in enhancing the likelihood for undergraduate Black male retention. Advancing research on retention and exploring modifications of existing practices are vital for the future of postsecondary education, especially for America's least retained population.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to better understand how social integration contributed to Black male undergraduate retention at one public Midwestern predominantly White institution. Tinto (1987, 1993) described social integration as nonacademic experiences that occur outside of class. On many campuses social integration is primarily facilitated by a division of student affairs. Research (Astin, 1977, 1987, 1993, 1996; Kuh, 1991, 2009; Seidman, 2005a, 2005b; Tinto, 1993, 2007; Zhao & Kuh, 2004) has demonstrated out of class experiences, such as those provided by student affairs, has had positive impact on outcomes such as student persistence, retention, and undergraduate degree completion. However, most of this research is neither centered on persisters nor minorities, including undergraduate Black male persisters at PWIs. This study adds to retention and persistence research by taking a qualitative phenomenological approach to better understanding the lived experiences of 10 undergraduate Black male persisters.

The central research question guiding this investigation was: *What meaning do Black male undergraduate persisters give to social integration and their retention at a PWI?* In addition to the central question four research sub-questions were formulated to get to the essence of Black male undergraduate social integration and retention at the research site:

1. How do participants describe their social integration experience at the institution?
2. What social integration or nonacademic themes do participants attribute to their retention at a public Midwestern PWI?
3. How important or insignificant is social integration when described in relation to Black male undergraduate retention?
4. What social integration initiatives do participants believe student affairs should employ, revise, or remove to increase Black male undergraduate retention?

Hearing the lived experiences of Black male persisters at one Midwestern PWI addressed each question. Eight themes and three sub-themes emerged from interpretation of the lived experiences of the participants. Interpreting findings from this study provided implications for improving social integration and student retention at the research site.

Themes from this investigation show participants had a mixture of social integration experiences at the PWI; however it was evident the theme “Not Leaving” was the essence of this study. Whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the university and their social integration experiences, it was evident these men were driven and not leaving without a degree from this Midwestern PWI. Consistent with Tinto’s (1987, 1993, 2012) findings, social integration was interpreted as more of a plus factor than an essential determinant in the retention of the undergraduate Black men in this study.

Despite consistency with student departure theory, findings from this study point to support for critiques of application for minority students. A number of studies (Allen, 1992; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Guiffrida, 2005; Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2011) called for modification of student departure theory in order to more fully understand the experiences of minority students at PWIs. Participants' discussions of reluctance to separate from their Black identity and home communities add support to the call for a revision of student departure theory in order to more fully understand the experiences of minority students at PWIs.

Although social integration was not deemed the primary reason the men in this study were retained, social integration was described as an important factor for retention of Black male undergraduates at PWIs. Results While this study focused on one element of student departure theory, there was connection to the whole theory. Findings from this study provide practical applications for Student Affairs to improve social integration and increase the likelihood for retention of Black male undergraduates at one public Midwestern predominantly White institution.

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APPENDIX A: Informed Consent

Project Title: Practical Applications For Student Affairs: A Phenomenological Exploration of How Black Male Undergraduate Persisters Describe Retention and Social Integration at a Midwestern PWI

Principal Investigator: Andre L. Fortune

Purpose of the Research: This is a research project that focuses on understanding Black male undergraduate experiences that occur outside of class at a predominantly White institution. In order to participate you must be 19 years of age or older and identify as a Black or African-American man. You must also be an undergraduate or recent graduate (within the last calendar year) at the University.

Procedures: Participation in this research study includes at least one interview, which should take no longer than 90 minutes to complete. If a second interview is needed, it will be no more than 60 minutes.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: Your interview responses will be strictly confidential. Results from interviews will be shared anonymously, or without association to you. A summary of multiple research participant responses may be shared or published, but your identity and your responses will be confidential.

Risks and/or Discomforts: There are no known risks to participating in this study.

Benefits: There are no known direct benefits; however your responses may help to improve the campus environment for current and future generations of Black male undergraduates.

Right of refusal/withdrawal: You are free to decide not to participate in this study. You can also withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University.

Questions: If you have any questions at any time, please ask the principal or secondary investigator. If you would like to speak to someone else, please call the Research Compliance Services Office at IRB phone number or IRB email.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy: You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

☐ Check if you agree to be audio recorded during the interview.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

Andre L. Fortune, M.S.Ed., Principal Investigator

Brent Cejda, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator

Office Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx

Office Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx

APPENDIX B: Demographic Questionnaire

DIRECTIONS: Please answer questions honestly as possible. If you are uncertain about what a question means, please ask for clarification. Your responses will be kept confidential. Responses will be displayed to show demographics of participants for this study, without association to you.

Please indicate your sex.

☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other _____

Please indicate your ethnic/racial identification.

Select all that apply.

- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ African-American or Black
- ☐ American Indian or other Native American
- ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Caucasian or White (non-Hispanic)
- ☐ Latino
- ☐ Other _____

Current Class Standing:

☐ **Junior** (53-88 earned hours) ☐ **Senior** (89 or more earned hours) ☐ **Graduated**

Your Major(s): _____

Please provide your estimated **cumulative grade point average (GPA)**: _____

Have you **ever** participated in NCAA Division-I athletics at this university?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Current Employment Status

Select all that apply.

- ☐ Never Employed During College
- ☐ Not Currently Employed
- ☐ Employed On-Campus
- ☐ Employed Off-Campus

Parent/Guardian Education

Please select your mother's (or female guardian's) highest completed education when you began college.

- ☐ Did not finish high school
- ☐ High School Diploma
- ☐ Some College, No Degree
- ☐ Associate Degree Or Certificate
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Graduate/Professional School, No Degree
- ☐ Graduate/Professional Degree
- ☐ Other _____

Please select your father's (or male guardian's) highest completed education when you began college.

- ☐ Did not finish high school
- ☐ High School Diploma
- ☐ Some College, No Degree
- ☐ Associate Degree Or Certificate
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Graduate/Professional School, No Degree
- ☐ Graduate/Professional Degree
- ☐ Other _____

Before you came to college, which of the following describe your home community?
Select one option only.

- ☐ Rural
- ☐ Suburban
- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Other _____

Hometown: _____

Current Age: _____ Age Your Freshman Year of College: _____

Please print your legal name. **Name:** _____

Thank you for your time and participation!

APPENDIX C: Interview Protocol

Date:	Pseudonym:
Place:	Interviewee:
Interview Number:	Time of Interview: (beginning) (end)

Introduction: Hello (interviewee's name). Thank you for taking your time to answer a few of my questions about your experiences as a Black undergraduate male on this campus. As stated in the informed consent letter, you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or harm. Please let me know if you have any questions at any point in this research process.

The purpose of this research is better understand what life outside the classroom is like for Black undergraduate males on a predominantly White campus. I have some questions I wrote before starting the interview, but I may ask additional questions that are not pre-written. With your consent I will be taking notes and audio recording this interview to assist with my data analysis.

After this interview, one or more follow-up interviews may be necessary. If this is the case, I will contact you. After I compile data from multiple interviews I will give you an opportunity to review my findings and to verify if my interpretations of your responses are accurate.

Before we get started with the interview, unless you have any questions, I would like you to complete a brief demographic form to help me learn more about you.

1. What has life been like for you as a Black man at this university?
 - a. Please tell me about a typical day your first year here. Share your thoughts and feelings, the negative, positive, and the neutral, in as much detail as you remember.
 - i. What was life outside of class like?
 - ii. How did you meet people?
 - iii. When you were not in class, where did you spend your time on campus?
 - b. Please tell me about a typical day on campus for you now.
 - i. When it comes to life outside the classroom, tell me what you have liked about your college experience?
 - ii. When it comes to life outside the classroom, tell me what you have disliked about your college experience?
2. If there was ever a time when you thought about leaving the university, but didn't, can you tell me about that?
 - a. What contributed to the reason you didn't leave?
 - b. Was there a program that influenced your decision to stay?
 - c. Was there a person or people at the university (e.g., staff, faculty, or friend) that influenced your decision to stay?

Date:	Pseudonym:
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3. The majority of Black men at predominantly White campuses do not graduate within six years of starting college. Beyond having the grades to earn a degree, what do you believe are the reasons you will graduate (or have graduated)?
 - a. Tell me about any program or university service that you believe played a significant role in you staying enrolled.
 - b. Tell me about any particular person or people that you believe has played a significant role in you staying enrolled.
 - c. What is the most common reason why Black males that you know leave this university before they graduate?

4. Tell me how important it is for you to be around other Black people.
 - a. How does your view on this match with how you felt before coming to school here?
 - b. In most cases there are many more Blacks at an HBCU than here. How do you feel being around fewer Blacks matters when it comes to Black men finishing their degree here?

5. How important is being involved in a student organization to your desire to stay in college?
 - a. How do you think membership or participation in a traditionally racial minority-focused student organization (e.g., Black fraternity, Black Student Government, etc.) has impacted your desire to stay or leave this campus?

6. What does the campus culture center mean for you?
 - a. What does the campus culture center mean for your desire to stay at this university?
 - b. What do you think life on campus would be like for you if this campus did not have a culture center?
 - c. What do you think the culture center means for other Black men on this campus?

7. If you were in charge of this university what would you recommend for increasing Black male degree completion here?
 - a. Are there specific programs/services/facilities/policies/procedures you would put in place?
 - b. Are there programs/services/facilities/policies/procedures you would eliminate?

Date:	Pseudonym:
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8. Some Black men feel that to be successful in college they have to disconnect from friends and family from home. How do you feel about that?
 - a. What do you think about Black men being called “Oreo”, “sellout”, or similar names, because they have chosen to go to college?
 - b. What do you think about Black men feeling like they have to “sellout” to be successful in college?
9. Is there anything you would like to tell me about your experiences at the university that I have not asked you about?

Final question: Are there other Black male undergraduates you would recommend I talk to for this research study?

APPENDIX D: Transcriptionist Agreement

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Statement

I _____ (name of transcriptionist) agree to hold all information contained on audio recordings/and in interviews received from Andre L. Fortune, primary investigator for PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF HOW BLACK MALE UNDERGRADUATE PERSISTERS DESCRIBE RETENTION AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION AT A MIDWESTERN PWI in confidence with regard to the individual and institutions involved in the research study. I understand that to violate this agreement would constitute a serious and unethical infringement on the informant's right to privacy.

I also certify that I have completed the CITI Limited Research Worker training in Human Research Protections.

Signature of Transcriptionist

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date